This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

WIDENER
HN P15A

VE RI TAS

HARVARD COLLEGE
LIBRARY

IN MEMORY OF
WAINWRIGHT MERRILL
CLASS OF 1919
*
BORN AT CAMBRIDGE MAY 26,1898
KILLED AT YPRES NOVEMBER 6,1917

MYRA GRAY;

OR,

SOWN IN TEARS, REAPED IN JOY.

A Novel.

BY

CHARLES CARLOS-CLARKE,

AUTHOR OF "CHARLIE THORNHILL," "WHICH IS THE WINNER," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

1870.

[*The right of translation reserved.*]

21428.23.19.no(2)

LONDON:
PRINTED BY VIRTUE AND CO.,
CITY ROAD.

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCHÜTZEN FEST AT SCHLAGSTEIN . . . . . PAGE 1

CHAPTER II.

RICHARD FETHERSTONE MAKES A CONFESSION 32

CHAPTER III.

MR. AND MRS. FERRERS COME TO TOWN FOR THE SEASON . 62

CHAPTER IV.

MYRA'S INTRODUCTION TO SOCIETY 83

CHAPTER V.

THE DIRECTOR'S WHITE BAIT AT THE WEST-END . . . 99

CHAPTER VI.

MYRA SEES AN OLD FACE IN A NEW LIGHT 113

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. TREBY AT HOME 143

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BITTER FRUIT OF SELF-WILL 166

CHAPTER IX.

PAGE

ASCOT. MIRABEAU EFFECTS A REVOLUTION 186

CHAPTER X.

DELORAINE ATTEMPTS TO REFORM "THE FINEST PISANTRY IN THE WORLD" 215

CHAPTER XI.

DELORAINE SCENTS A MYSTERY 248

CHAPTER XII.

AND COMES RATHER UNEXPECTEDLY ON THE HUNTED FOX 268

CHAPTER XIII.

AN EMPTY HOUSE IN CHESTER STREET 292

MYRA GRAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCHÜTZEN FEST AT SCHLAGSTEIN.

BY the end of September—that is, by two months after the death of Lord Fitzcourthope—Myra Gray had risen in value exceedingly; or rather it would appear so, from the sudden regard that her friends and relations expressed for her. She was not to be allowed to throw herself away; and that independence which she hoped to have enjoyed under her own rule was the very thing of which she felt she was about to be deprived. It was impossible to help drawing a contrast between this interest and the great indifference which made life so pleasant six months before. She

knew her aunt only by name, and Lady Honoria and her sister had only been as kind to her as they had been to the pointers, who were allowed to come in and be patted on certain days, or have a lavish mess served up to them in the kitchen, as the fancy urged them. They never do feed dogs in the kennel in Ireland, you know. The friend who had been unvarying in his affection till she left him to be finished, was dead; and the man who used to ride with her, and was now her sort of guardian, had taken to writing judicious letters. I believe Myra Gray had every virtue but judgment, and she was not likely to become a violent admirer of it in others when it opposed her own wishes.

Mrs. Montressor, poor soul, having no moral support, and half afraid for her pecuniary interests, had a hard part to play. She really did not know how far Myra would be reasonable, or allow herself to be guided by her friends. Of course, when writing became necessary, they all attacked her, directly or indirectly; and though they none of them were honest enough to speak out, they all hinted at the necessity for close supervision of some kind—just the sort of

supervision which Myra was likely to resent, by taking herself off at a moment's notice; and it took several small baronesses to make up one good English pupil.

They were much more outspoken to Myra Gray herself; but that is not to be wondered at; for she had herself invited their confidence by a startling display of her own. In a beautiful and poetic ignorance of the fitness of things, she had cultivated the notion that a young lady of eighteen who had been made independent by the surrender of her own accumulated property, had a right to look for happiness in her own way. She knew enough of the world, and of the decencies of society, to feel that if she had anything to tell it should be told to her aunt, or to her late protector's daughters, and some female friend in England; that to make Mathilde her only *confidante* was not wrong or impolitic, but in bad taste. Now her present idea of happiness centred in Gilbert Ferrers, who had kept up a correspondence with her from the time of the duel, and who had made his feelings, or their very excellent imitations known to her more plainly, more forcibly, and

more unmistakably since his conversation with Mr. Blunt. He was a clever man of business, if he was nothing else, and it mattered little to him, with his knowledge of affairs, that it must take time to realise the little but convenient fortune to come to Myra. He had ascertained beyond doubt that it was all right; and a clever speculator who aspires to the direction of brittle companies knew where to lay his hand upon ready money when the securities were tangible.

Now the odd part of Myra Gray's conduct is, not that, being her own mistress, she should have told her female friends in England that she had engaged herself, or considered herself engaged, to an adventurer like Gilbert Ferrers, but that she should never have regarded the step as unfeasible. She did not know what we know of him, nor did her friends when they wrote to her to impugn her prudence. She thought he was in just as good a position of life as herself and her friends. She knew he was considerably better-looking than most of them, Deloraine himself included, and she may be forgiven for not seeing in his free-and-easy, supercilious air anything of the lurking Bohe-

mian beneath the surface—that she did not know a polished savage when she saw one. But she ought to have guessed what other people would say to a man without credentials about to carry off an English girl of tender years away from her friends, without counsel and advice, with a fair round sum of money on which to begin life.

Of course everybody knows what they did say, and Myra could make no mistake about what they wrote.

Her aunt in Devonshire, having heard from Myra Gray the plan she proposed for herself of marrying a gentleman to whom she had long been attached, broke ground fiercely and illogically. Mrs. Treby wrote off to Lady Honoria, judging that the Castle Courthope people must have more influence over an obstinate visionary than she. It had very little effect at the time. However, then she wrote to Myra herself:—"Could she be so very imprudent as to listen to a person her knowledge of whom must be very slight, and whose respectability must be doubtful, as that of most gentlemen wandering alone on the Continent. Had she come in the first

instance to her house in Devonshire, such a thing never could have happened." Then followed vague and mysterious hints of Chancery, which Mrs. Treby had heard was applicable to such cases, and prevention to any interested marriages, where the money was on the side of the lady. This frightened Myra exceedingly—but not into submission. It was, on the contrary, the strongest argument in favour of running away.

Lady Honoria did not write at once, but sent to Henry Deloraine for something—she called it advice. The fact is, that the communication was double-barreled. It brought him into contact with Lady Honoria on a delicate subject, and it tended to shock any predisposition in favour of Myra which might be growing in Deloraine's mind. When she wrote to Myra Gray, it was to announce Henry Deloraine's intention of paying a visit to Schlagstein and denouncing precipitate measures, with a request to know who was the gentleman; for it seems odd that in her hurry she had told nobody the name of the person in whose favour she was about to sacrifice her liberty.

Myra was terribly afraid from all this that she might meet with strong opposition to her match, and was only sustained by the letters of Gilbert Ferrers, who bid her be of good cheer, as all would be well, and he waited only for leisure to come to Schlagstein to "secure his treasure." Whether a lurking jest prompted this form of expression I cannot say: it was singularly appropriate. Mathilde herself said nothing; she allowed Myra to pour her mixed tale of love and doubt into her ear, but made no response. Mathilde's day was over; and she was wondering only how her own interests would be served when Gilbert Ferrers was married to another.

But Mrs. Montressor sat again in her own little room, empty of furniture to English eyes, but neat with a cleanly store of moulded porcelain, its little desk of polyglot books, its unstained, polished boards, and—luxury upon luxuries!—six feet square of carpeting. And with her sat Mathilde, her beautiful head aching with the troublesome interest which she was compelled to take, when she would have willingly been left a spectator. Mrs. Montressor

did not know her participation in the business, or she might have chosen another *confidante.* She filled her cup, and spoke—

"Mathilde, have you remarked nothing peculiar in our dear friend Myra lately?"

"Something of an independent spirit, which might have been expected."

"Truly; but, still, so widely different even within the last few days."

"She may be expecting to leave Schlagstein," said Mathilde, ill-naturedly.

"I think not," rejoined the other thoughtfully. "Can you conjecture anything?"

"Perhaps she hates being dictated to."

"And she has been? Yes. Mathilde von Robeck, why not have allowed us to manage her matters for her? You especially," added the elder lady graciously. "You, who, in all probability, know much more of her plans than any of us."

"I don't think she has any," answered Mathilde, testily and untruly.

"We all have plans at her age, my dear. Her plan was to have stopped here contentedly for another six or eight months. To have

continued her very frequent correspondence, which may be Platonic or otherwise, with that very handsome young man, who was nearly shot for her, and then to have gone to England, and forgotten his existence among her acquaintances of the great world.".

"You don't know her, madame. I do. She is very honest, very affectionate, very truthful, and very imprudent; but not so imprudent as her friends, who will succeed in making her marry the young man in question from sheer opposition."

"It would be a bad thing for her to do," said Mrs. Montressor, mindful of her boarder, "and would be our duty to prevent, if possible. We must, however, conciliate, for it would not do to drive her from such a home. And here she is not likely to see him."

"You think not. I think he will come here before long; and if you do your duty you will send her away to England."

Mrs. Montressor lost her breath and her colour, and she had plenty to lose; when she recovered them both she said:—

"Mathilde, you have her interests at heart, I

know. Watch over her closely. You understand. We must not have a scandal, if we can avoid it."

"Nor lose a pupil." All madame's colour was back again. "But you need not fear. The gentleman cannot visit here without your permission; and I do not think Myra would venture upon a return to England without sufficient cause and preparation." Mathilde here rose, with the purpose of leaving.

"And you would yourself be sorry to lose her?"

"Indeed, I should. I almost think I should go too." She said this calmly, and then left the room. Poor Mrs. Montressor! Wretched are the money-makers, for they are always in doubt. However, here she set the one against the other, and it almost produced a balance. She was afraid of Mathilde von Robeck, and with moderately good cause.

"Mathilde," said Myra Gray, the next morning, "he will be in Schlagstein in a week."

"Who?"

"You know. Gilbert Ferrers. What shall I say to him?"

"Say to him? That entirely depends on what he will say to you."

"I know what he will say to me. He will want me to marry him."

"So you can, in good time. When your guardian and your relations know all about it. You can marry him in England, when you have returned."

"They already know all about it. I have told them that I am engaged, that I cannot break my word. Mathilde, I am in earnest. He has asked me, and I will marry him here." And Myra Gray threw a great deal of earnestness into her voice, more than Mathilde von Robeck believed to be in her.

"You will do wrong, Myra. Why not wait, as I tell you? It is better."

"I cannot wait. They talk of Chancery, and all sort of obstacles. You will assist me, Mathilde? You, who have helped to make me know what a happiness love is."

"You know I cannot help you, Myra. It would be very wrong of me to do so. Henceforth don't talk to me of it. Who is this man, this Gilbert Ferrers? What do you know

of him?" And Mathilde adopted a prudent tone.

"Know of him? He is beautiful, and clever, Mathilde; and a gentleman. I am sure of that. And did not he risk his life for me? And should I turn my back upon him now?"

"Not turn your back upon him, Myra. Wait and inquire."

"It is the same thing. He tells me circumstances make it desirable that we should be married now—soon, Mathilde. Ah, I know, he fears the separation as much as I do. We have many laws; but, once married, and I shall be my own mistress."

"With a master," sighed Mathilde, hardly, as if she felt it.

"And I shall do what I like with my own. We have many laws; but I shall not fear them then, and he shall have it all." Mathilde looked at her, and thought of Ferrers, that a worthless woman and a generous girl were both ready to give their all to him. Alas! What more had the one to give!

The small, but not inconvenient, despotism of a German duchy was frequently relieved by

popular *fêtes;* and it is not unworthy of remark that the miserable slaves of this despotism were, on those occasions, about the most cheerful of mankind. Whether it was the extraordinary reaction, or whether, like the Negro, they had an innate sense of enjoyment, which made up for their substantial misery, I cannot tell. Since then they have been made happy by a grandly conceived and mercifully executed nationality. Long may they preserve it, if they like it. A few years ago it was not so; and they threw all their recreative energies into dances, public gardens, *cafés*, fireworks, rifle-meetings, and pipes. They had a marvellous facility for imitating free peoples in their amusements, and no one, to see them in their casinos and *bals parés*, could have conceived that they were suffering under the pressure of a refined tyranny. Was it that the thin cloud of tobacco-smoke, as it rolled upwards from their painted pipes, modified or mystified their real feelings, as the thin gauze of a spotted muslin decks a bad complexion and ordinary features with the freshness and delicacy of eternal youth? Or was it that this despotism was so lightly handled

by their aristocratic rulers as to be more social than political, and to have wrought a good work in them by bringing society to its bearings? I am sure we stand in need of something like it in these days of social equality, when it seems difficult to distinguish between a duke and a drayman, and when your tailor calls upon you in his brougham to inquire after his little bill, or smiles blandly upon his customers from his stall at the Opera. We are a great, free, and enlightened people, and the little Schlagsteiners were a set of servile bondsmen, ignorant of the beauty of free institutions. Soulless numskulls! they were neither presented at Court, nor aspired to direct legislation. They feared God, and the Grand Duke too; and therefore the great Burke would not have classed them among those slaves of despotism who had lost that only fear which generates true courage.

Among the popular amusements of Schlagstein the most popular was the Schützen Fest. It was a great occasion for rubbing shoulders with an otherwise unapproachable aristocracy. To be sure it held out temptations to the

jeunesse dorée more seductive than the prospects of tumbling over a buhl-table in an attempt to back out of the august presence of a fat dowager. The etiquette of the rifle-range was a trifle less strict than that of the Palace, and doubtless the *bourgeoisie* was more likely to unbend to a blue and silver hussar than the ladies-in-waiting of a Court, where it was not *selon les règles* to talk to your partner in the presence of royalty. Ladies-in-waiting! Heaven save the mark! And they were likely to be so. And when ladies have waited a certain length of time, it is not astonishing that they have to wait altogether.

"Mrs. Montressor, Miss Gray wants to go to the Schützen Fest."

Mrs. Montressor meant to say, "The devil she does," but she felt the impropriety, and merely remarked, "You don't say so, my dear mademoiselle!"

"Indeed I do," said Mathilde; "and it's my opinion she means to go."

"Means to go! but the thing is simply impossible."

"Nothing seems to be impossible to Myra Gray, madame."

Mrs. Montressor was for a moment nonplussed. Certainly Myra ought not to go, and yet anything was better than thwarting her openly.

"How does she propose to go?" at length said Mrs. Montressor.

"I have not the slightest idea. She proposes to be present each day; the first to see the shooting and to see the ceremony of electing the Queen of the Fête. She wishes to go to the concert on the second day; and to the ball on the evening of the third day."

"But she knows she cannot go alone. And into such a crowd! Can you suggest any means of her seeing the *fête* with propriety?"

"Not I, madame, unless you would yourself——"

"I? Oh! Mathilde, you know since my change of circumstances——"

Mathilde did know what was coming, and understood her to mean that it was like the old cobbler's idea of a lark, "very pleasant, but did not pay;" so she answered—

"Of course I only suggested. You know a great many of the better class do go to see

the shooting, but as to the opera and the ball——"

"The opera and ball—out of the question; unless she knows some lady to take her; but you might, I think, go with her to the shooting, and if old Frau Jansen would give you seats at her windows in the Markt Platz, she might see it all; and with you, Mathilde, no harm could happen."

"If you wish it I will go; but I do not feel any particular confidence in her prudence, nor in my own influence."

Mathilde spoke thus, and she had seldom spoken so diffidently of her own powers.

And as time drew on, and the autumn days grew shorter, but not the less beautiful, we come to within a week of the Schützen Fest. The town began to fill again, not with the counts-palatine, princes, dukes, earls, or barons of the duchy and its parent empire, but with the priests, farmers, land-cultivators, tradesmen, professors, with the manufacturers, artizans, idlers, paupers, and ne'er-do-wells of every description. They were all come to see the shooting. Many of them to stay to the concert

and ball. Certainly, a week or ten days before the meeting, the hotels were filling, and lodgings had risen slightly in price. Bavarian beer came in, too, in large orders, as if a detachment of students from Heidelberg, or some such place, were likely to be present.

"My good Mrs. Funken, you must be expecting all your family."

"No, my dear; only twelve of my own altogether; but Fritz, who had my rooms last year, will be here, and Carl Shaver talks of coming with him. They do say he means to challenge the winner to a private match for seven thalers."

"Seven thalers, dame? Ach, Jesu, what a sum!"

"I hope you don't encourage gambling," said Frau Jansen, sententiously; "it's a sad thing. It was the ruin of my nephew, that one visit to Baden-Baden." And as the youngster had lost all he had with him—a hundred and thirty francs—the blow was a heavy one to the Frau and her family.

"And who do you expect, Mrs. Jansen?" inquired Mrs. Funken, after a pause.

"Well now, gossip, I've been lucky. The rooms are good, and worth the money. Five thalers, twenty silver groschen, stove and lights included, for the week is not so bad." And here she stopped to enjoy the other's amazement.

"Bad! No! Five thalers twenty—Gott bewahr! but you're always in luck. You won the twentieth of the thousand-franc lottery last year. Ach, Frau, be careful; remember your nephew."

"Yes, yes, to be sure, Mrs. Funken; we ought to be careful; but we were staying at the time with Herr Rochnadel, the tailor, in Frankfort. You know he's a rich man, and a cousin of my man's; and when one's with the wolves one must hunt with them."

"That's true, Frau; but who's to be your lodger the week after next?" for it did not escape Mrs. Funken that that part of the conversation had somehow slipped through her fingers.

Frau Jansen was in a corner, and though she had been bound to secrecy, she thought she might trust one person—just one sieve to help her to hold the chaff. Besides, what woman—

what lodging-house keeper, I mean—can resist making a rival jealous? Not Mrs. Jansen, at all events.

"You'll not mention it?"

"Ach! is it so great as that? Not to Funken himself if you wish it."

"You remember the young and beautiful Englishman, who was with me a month in the summer?"

"Eh! he who shot the Baron de la Fels in the forest?"

"Hist! Frau, not so loud. The same; but it was done in fair fight. They all said so on the court-martial. Well, he's coming here; and the rooms are engaged for him. It's thought better and safer, since the accident, for him not to go to the Pfälzer Hof. For the matter of that, I think we can give him as good a dinner, if not such a long one; and as to the wine, why the good man's Steinberger cabinet of thirty-four—— Ach! but I say nothing."

Nor did Frau Funken; for she was so eaten up with a sort of jealous bewonderment, that she turned on her heel, and found her sour krout more sour than usual on that day.

A conversation equally interesting took place about the same time between Mathilde von Robeck and her friend Myra, and which is equally important to the progress of our story. The girls were sitting together in the garden of the *pension;* the English girl embroidered, the German was knitting.

"Mathilde, do you think Gilbert Ferrers will come?" said the former, timidly.

"You know him better than I do," replied the other evasively and untruthfully.

"But do you think he will? You know so much better than I what is probable."

"I think he will, if he says so. Why not?"

"And will it be very wrong? He says he will come—and—I say Mathilde——"

"Speak out, Myra, if it's anything you want me to hear."

"Yes, I do. I've had a letter from my new guardian, Mr. Deloraine; and he says so much about—— I should like you to see it."

"I had rather not see it. Indeed, I will not read it, Myra."

"But he talks of coming here; and he hints at all sorts of things, dishonourable motives on

Gilbert's part, though he does not even know him. Ah! I am sure they will do all they can!"

"Perhaps they are right, Myra," and Mathilde never looked more sincere than at that moment.

"You didn't think so once, Mathilde," said Myra, angrily and hastily.

"Circumstances are altered."

"But not Gilbert Ferrers, nor I; but it seems that everybody is against me now when I might be so happy." And Myra left the garden in tears, not of repentance, but of petulance.

This threatened visit of Deloraine's had added fuel to the flame, and the expressions in his letter had been ill-chosen for attaining his object. He had not mentioned the subject in very particular terms, but he had spoken generally of imprudence, and of the necessity of a visit to Germany, to endeavour to bring back Myra to Castle Courthope, or to Mrs. Treby. Much had been added on the respectability of a settled home.

There were two ways to have dealt with the matter. One was to have stated his knowledge

or suspicions of the respectability of the intended connection, to have asked for time, and to have offered proof if necessary. For Myra had plenty of pride. Or he might have written of his intention to come, and of the home he had in view, without alluding to the cause. For Myra had plenty of sense when she was not frightened: then she was like a young horse, who is as likely to kill himself as his rider—possibly both.

Her line of argument was a false one now, but a natural one. "They are all bent on breaking my resolution. Their prejudices are absurd. If I who know him love him, can anything be so unreasonable as the objections to him of those who know nothing about him?" This was not quite true, as the reader shall shortly know, but it was nearly true; for Myra had never told her friends who was her lover by name. She had been honest enough about the circumstances, and they acute enough in their conjectures. An adventurer, strolling on the Continent, fighting duels, breaking banks, found at the Grand Duchess's, unknown to the *habitués* of the place! Of course he wanted her money.

Lady Honoria and her sister did not believe in Myra's personal charms, it must be remembered.

Scraps of intelligence had come from Madame de Horsemann, but, as may be supposed, of a highly unintelligible nature. The lively old lady knew nothing, but that he was *beau garçon, tout a fait comme il faut.* Every good-looking man who was civil to her on presentation was so. She had never heard of attachment; and as to the duel, it served Monsieur de la Fels right, and it was much to be regretted he got well so soon. Deloraine had never come across the Guardsman who had been Ferrers' second and companion, or he might have been wiser and quicker in his movements; which would have certainly made a difference to the fortunes of Myra Gray. Had he but known that the *Monsieur Ferrer* of Madame de Horsemann was a certain Gilbert Ferrers—but he did not know that till later.

The day of the *fête* rose with a warmth and beauty exceptional for an October day, fine as that festival sacred to pheasants sometimes is in the country. It was all-important in this

case, for rain is as disagreeable for rifle-shooting as it is detrimental to new bonnets; and the populace, when it does throw off its bondage and enjoy itself, is apt to be very lavish of penny ribbon.

By nine o'clock a.m. the town was astir. Schlagstein was not itself, and the form it had assumed for the time was that of a jovial roisterer. It was all beer, pipes, fluttering streamers and flags, which looked very like a washing day—only the doubt has been expressed as to whether a washing day in Germany is a type of nationality at all. Very oddly-shaped caps and hats of divers colours were much the fashion; they fluttered gaily with cocks' tails and flaunting ribbons, and to one learned in student life, or *burschenschaft*, they were all symbolical of some craft or guild or brotherhood inexplicable to the stranger. Schopins of wine, and in many cases whole bottles of Neirteiner and Forster were being consumed thus early by the travellers from the country. If the Pfälzer Hof contrived to retain its respectability, only broken in upon by the moderate orders of the officers of dragoons and

the early dominoes of the professional pleasure-seekers, the smaller hostelries made up for the restraint. They were, indeed, in full swing; and when the bell of the Domkirche rang out a peal, and the drums beat for assembling, the little capital was, as far as its people were concerned, in a vortex of dissipation. It seemed as if the whole populace had determined upon getting tipsy without reserve, and on the outside of their houses.

Two prettier girls than Mathilde and Myra Gray did not tread the streets of Schlagstein on that morning; and as they made their way to the window they were to occupy until the procession had passed, the crowd paid them an involuntary tribute of admiration, by making way for themselves and the servant by whom they were accompanied. The youth of the town having now formed into a company, looking vastly proud of themselves in their soldier-like costumes, each with his rifle slung over his shoulder, and marching past in quick time to one of the bands of the city, proceeded to the hill-side on the other side of the river, across the bridge where we have once seen Mathilde

and her lover—a charming spot, which their tyrants had laid out for the honourable Gesellschaft at considerable trouble and expense.

Onward they passed, accompanied by their friends of the different guilds or corporations, decorated as fancy or custom dictated—the cordwainers, clothiers, bookbinders, fishmongers, fruiterers, confectioners, and all sorts of persons to all sorts of music. Banners floated, brass bands brayed as they approached the country, like donkeys at the sight of greens. Troops of women, all in holiday apparel, and each with a secret interest in the trial that was to take place; for might not she be chosen Queen of the Fête, if her Ferdinand or Theodor should chance to be the winner of the prize? Pretty girls they were, many of them daughters of good honest burghers, who had put on their best dresses and put up their best wishes for one whom perhaps Herr Jansen or Herr Funken would like less than his daughter to see master of the situation; for then der schurker Theodor or der arme Ferdinand, who had not a rap beyond his four thalers a week, and who was wedded to hard work to get that, would certainly chose

Nettchen Jansen or Amelie Funken to sit by them for the rest of the week, to play queen to their king, to open the ball, to order the music for the concert, and to drive with them all over the town and country, attended only by their ladies and gentlemen of the court in other carriages and four, who were as foolish, as hot-blooded, and as pauperised as themselves. Surely it was time such tomfoolery was done away with! Young folks were not what they were when Funken and Jansen were apprentices, and themselves shot for prizes with no success, nor was Nettchen nor Amelie near so prudent either of them as their own mother! But there were others who knew better. The Schützen Fest was an old institution, an outlet for hot blood, and the rulers of Schlagstein preferred dangerous flirtations to revolution.

"Marie," said Gretchen Schumacher to her friend, "if Heinrich wins the prize, be sure to make me your *dame de cour*."

"But perhaps he won't ask me to be queen," said the other slily.

"Och, wie! What is it then? Have you quarrelled?"

"Quarrelled! Oh, dear, no. Only, you know, why should Heinrich——"

"Don't talk like a little fool. Promise now——"

"Yes, yes," said she, blushing; "and if Carl——"

"Certainly. And now come along, or we shall be late, and shall not get a good place." Saying which the two young girls walked on to join some friends whom they just then caught sight of in front.

When Mathilde and Myra Gray had seen what they could from their window in the Markt Platz, they went up to the rifle ground, accompanied by Mrs. Montressor herself. She had so far broken through her rule as to accommodate herself to circumstances; and having taken a carriage, she called, with her old friend the professor of calisthenics, at Frau Jansen's, and took on the two girls with her. It was a pretty sight, but somewhat monotonous, as each time the little puff of white smoke lifted, the crack of the rifle came back to the ear, and the signal was made of success or the reverse. But Myra was not much amused, as the Professor

observed, and Mrs. Montressor was able to pride herself on her own foresight when she prognosticated very early sensations of fatigue to Miss Gray.

Myra was fatigued from two or three causes. The affair was stupid, too business-like to please her; and she had had a disappointment in the appearance of Mrs. Montressor, who had made much of her past sorrows and her present incapacity for enjoyment. She was not sorry when it was time for the carriage to return, and never more silently loud in her praises of an early dinner. The rooms promised were to be kept for Myra and her friend until the return of the winner and the lady whom he might select, and which was by far the most exciting part of the show. The impatience Myra exhibited for getting through some potato soup, some sour krout and limp chicken, some trout stewed in butter and white wine, an omelette and confections, some roast veal, with stewed prunes and Swiss cheese, was worthy of a better cause. She seemed to have forgotten the discomforts of a German *ménage* in the pleasure of getting away from it.

And she had the satisfaction of seeing a very pretty young woman, not Miss Nettchen Jansen nor Miss Amelie Funken, sitting in a hired carriage by the side of the winner of the prize. They were followed by their whole court, with highly caparisoned steeds and the bands as before. They stopped to drink wine everywhere. The banners waved, the streamers fluttered, and the imitation queen got very red in the face before the evening closed in. And so indeed did many more—Myra among the number; for she turned furtively and looked at the door, and her attention was evidently divided between the crowd without and the solitude within. And Mathilde, with her glorious hair and seagreen eyes (they were of an indescribable colour, but very lovely), was restless and apprehensive. And the crowds passed heedlessly on, as it came towards the tail somewhat of a rabble. By the time they were tired out, and Mathilde thought it time to go, the door slowly opened, and there stood before them Gilbert Ferrers. It was an evil day for Myra Gray when Gilbert came between her and that opening door.

CHAPTER II.

RICHARD FETHERSTONE MAKES A CONFESSION.

WHILE the Schützen Fest was taking place at Schlagstein, while Myra, and Mathilde, and Gilbert Ferrers were acting their parts in the drama of life in one place, a scene was enacting, which also has reference to this story, in another. After Lord Fitzcourthope's death, and when the necessary business of such melancholy events had been pretty well settled, more to the satisfaction of the undertaker than anybody else, Deloraine had left London for Ireland. The daughters of the late Earl were with their brother, the present Earl, at Castle Courthope. In their mode of living the worthy spendthrift's death had made no alteration. It never does. Death does

not knock with equal force at the doors of the palace and wicket of the cottage, only with equal certainty and equal impartiality as to time.

My brother, the reigning monarch, albeit considerably pauperised by a long line of hard-riding, dinner-giving, county-contesting ancestors, will not see his sisters driven from post to pillar until the old house is burnt over his head. His wife, whenever she comes home, will have to put up with the junior members of the late parent stock. She may grumble, and introduce a few of her own; but blood is thicker than water, and in your great families papa passes away. He does not tumble suddenly off the perch, leaving every one but the heir-at-law to fight his or her own battle. The boys sometimes find a difference; they have to buy their own horses, and give up venting their displeasure upon the servants. They cannot shoot the covers as a right, or rabbit in the home-wood, without permission, nor do they threaten any longer the keepers with instant dismissal unless their demands are complied with. But for them there is still a knife and fork, and the third

of a magnum, and a bed at their service, if the claim be modestly urged, and the permission not unduly trespassed upon. And if the worst comes to the worst, the hardest-hearted eldest brother will not refuse to assist in getting permanently rid of his incumbrances by an appointment in the Colonies or a snug berth at home, which may make the persistency of friendship and affection more respectable in appearance, and less expensive in reality.

But when Death knocks at the wicket-gate of the cottage, and, lifting the latch, inquires for the good man of the house, the mourning is less decent, but far more real. The streamers are not so long, and sometimes the love has not been so deep. But the tears are of iron. The memories are not so sacred, regrets and retrospections are not more tender. But the bread-winner has departed. Hunger adds poignancy to the widow's and children's sufferings. It is not only that he will appear no more on Saturday evening, but he will bring nothing home any more. "Henceforth we must go out. It is no longer his home; therefore, no longer to be ours." The knock at the castle shakes the

house, and it rights itself again. The knock at the hovel destroys its existence, and it has ceased to be a home to its present occupants for ever; only because papa is not there.

But this is not at all what I meant to say. And as I have only to represent that Castle Courthope had already settled into its former hopeless habits of extravagance (the only cure for which could have been the Encumbered Estates Commission), and that Henry Deloraine was back at Mount Rasselas, I admit that I might have done so in fewer words.

Mount Rasselas was an exceedingly pleasant place. It was a good bachelor's house, until the proprietor chose to marry; and then might be made one of the best homes in Ireland. It was well situated, with good woodlands above it, warm and snugly ensconced among sheltering slopes of the hill-sides, which rose to the north and east. It had, too, the inexpressible charm of allowing all the income of the possessor to be spent upon real comforts; not on huge rooms, acres of carpet, and regiments of servants, but upon a compact and easily-managed establishment. As the house, so was

the stable, and every adjunct for pleasure or profit connected with it; for Henry Deloraine had a well-cultivated mind, and he liked good furniture, good pictures, good horses, and good retainers, and was not even above nor below paying for them, which so many men in that unhappy country have been. The curse of Ireland has been that unfortunate habit of—ah! there it is again—of *digression* from the limits of its liabilities. Let us get on. Deloraine sat in his study. It was a study to him; for he pulled down first one book, then another, then a third, reading in them all as opportunity offered, even to his old Eton books; now a bit of French, now a bit of Horace, ever and anon a page of history and politics. Then, to be sure, he fingered the locks of a new gun, or bent a favourite rod, or took down an old tandem whip from the wall, and caught the lash lightly and artistically, for all these things did he love. But it was a study for all that.

He was engaged in this way one morning at the time of which I write, when a servant came into the room and gave him a card, on which he read a name, which he had seldom seen or much

more frequently heard. "Richard Fetherstone," said he, as he read it. "In what room is Mr. Fetherstone?" "In the library," replied the man.

"Then say I will be with him directly. In the meantime order luncheon to be laid in the dining-room, and tell them to take the carriage round to the stable-yard, and take out the horses."

"Mr. Fetherstone came on horseback, sir."

"Then see that his horse is attended to." The man retired at once, and for a minute or two Henry Deloraine stood with the card in his hand, and repeated the name slowly once or twice. "Richard Fetherstone, an old friend of my father's. But what brings him here now?" With this he went to seek his visitor.

Richard Fetherstone was an extraordinary person, and a visit from him as unexpected as such a thing from a man in the same country can well be. He had, by choice partly and partly by circumstances, not visited nor willingly admitted a neighbour to his house, for fifteen years. His early career had been of the wildest. Strange stories were told of him as a *bon vivant*,

a gambler, a sportsman, and duellist. Though he had done many curious things, many at which moralists lifted their hand, and to which charitable acquaintances shut their eyes, he had never been accused of an ungenerous or unmanly action. He had been violent in temper, but forgiving in disposition; *roué* and inconsiderate, but not deliberately vicious; extravagant and licentious in habit, but liberal and unselfish in his pleasures. His fortune had been injured by his play and his hospitality; and when compelled to retrench his personal expenses he had still continued his charities and doles to the poor. He had been a most popular companion with the fast men of his day, to whom his house was always open, and for whose gratification he had a fund of anecdote and raillery always on hand. His spirits were high, and his character essentially impulsive. He married suddenly, unadvisedly, and very unhappily; and in a few years from that date he was a recluse, as strict as a hermit, so far as the admission of any one to his table was concerned. His private life was unknown to any but his servants, who reported it to be that of

any ordinary gentleman of good means. But from a particular date some ten years before the time we have now reached in our story, he had been dead to all business or pleasure, as far as Ireland was concerned.

Of course there were whispers at first: one said one thing, another said another; conjectures of all kinds were afloat, in which mingled all the elements of ancient poetry and modern romance: love, jealousy, madness, homicide, bigamy, and forgery made up the picture. No one ventured to tax the gentleman with them, lest one, at least, of the six should be proved true. Richard Fetherstone kept his own counsel, however; and as his wife had long disappeared from the scene, if any woman was at the bottom of the mystery it was not Mrs. Fetherstone of the Haugh, as his place was called.

So much for the present. When Henry Deloraine went into the library there rose from the chair in which he had been sitting one of the finest-looking men for his time of life that the eye could well look upon. As they advanced to meet one another, a stranger

would have been struck by them both, but Mr. Fetherstone had far the advantage in height, power, and that peculiar bearing which is nearer to dignity than anything else. He was dressed in a dark brown velveteen shooting-coat, a long waistcoat, and breeches of the same, with scrupulously-cleaned black butcher boots, on which an occasional splash served to set off the polished legs and feet to greater advantage.

Deloraine advanced with some degree of bashfulness, though in his own house. Not so the stranger, who said at once, as he shook hands with the younger man, "You must accept the excuses of your father's oldest friend, not for having trespassed upon you now, but for never having done so before." It was impossible to Deloraine to be otherwise than courteous; on the present occasion he was more than that.

"I know you were my father's friend, Mr. Fetherstone; and though I was a boy at school, I have often heard of you—not unfrequently in tones of regret that you had ceased to live in the world as formerly. Now

let me hope your memory of my dear father, and your wish to serve his son, may be one means of bringing you among us again."

"Mine is a long and sad story, and my present object in seeking you out is to guard you against one who has borne my name, and who has tarnished it with dishonour." Mr. Fetherstone stopped abruptly; but it was easy to see he was mastering some strong emotion.

"I should be glad," said Deloraine, "if in shielding myself I can be of service to you. I should prefer to suffer wrong than that you should suffer more, if the explanation you speak of gives you additional pain."

"No, no, Deloraine; that's like your poor father. I wish he were here now. The pain of bearing in silence has become intolerable to me in these years, and now it would be an injustice. To hear me is to relieve me." Henry Deloraine had no answer to make, so he rose, and ringing the bell, desired the luncheon to be postponed for half an hour, and to see that care was taken of Mr. Fetherstone's horse. "An old hunter, Deloraine, that

carried me as a five-year-old almost the last day I ever saw a hound; thanks for recollecting him."

"He shall be well taken care of, and if you will take nothing yourself before luncheon, we shall be uninterrupted here. Unless, perhaps, you prefer a stroll in the garden and to renew your acquaintance with a place that has undergone no alteration since you knew it."

"Faith, it's not a type, then, of any of us," said the elder gentleman, sighing heavily. "But come, let us go out; I shall say what I have to say less formally, better, perhaps, and with less embarrassment." Saying which he placed his arm almost affectionately through Deloraine's, and led the way as if the house had been his own. "I almost feel at home here, and you're so like what your father was that I feel almost young enough to jump that sunk fence as we used to do."

And then walking slowly up and down on the lawn and through the shrubbery, they talked for some minutes of local matters, suggested by the familiar faces of the scenery.

At length Richard Fetherstone stood still, and changing his pleasant tone to one more hard and dry, but not less kind, he continued.

"But, Mr. Deloraine, I did not come to tell you all these things. I think I should have gone out of this world and thus lost one happy day with which I shall now have to credit you. Now forgive me if I appear egotist, but I must tell you what few people know, though I dare say may conjecture."

"I have never heard a conjecture to your prejudice," said Deloraine.

"Nor I neither, sir," replied the other; and as he said it he looked as if it were better for the informant that he should not. "You have heard nothing of my early history?"

"Nothing, beyond the general account that from time to time I may have gathered from conversation with my father when we talked of his earlier days."

"Ah! he had little to reproach himself with, Deloraine. Mine, some of it, might advantageously be forgotten." Here he paused, apparently thinking when it might be well to go on. "You heard of my marriage?"

"Something; but not much, I confess. My father seldom referred to it."

"He did well. It was a painful subject. I married young—not wisely; but I was honest in what I did. I wished to repair a wrong, Deloraine, in the only way that my calmer moments pointed out as effectual; and I did so."

"To your own hindrance, Mr. Fetherstone. I have heard that much."

"I bore up against what I knew must be its consequences. My friends and companions —for they're not the same—fell off from me. I didn't expect the sympathy of their wives, for women in such matters are more unforgiving than men; but I expected their own."

"Do you mean you were deceived in that respect?"

"I deceived myself. Some of them told me so, with some other wholesome truths, which, however, it was too late to hear. Your father, who was also married, was the only exception to the rule. But he knew, and your mother, for which I can't blame her, made me feel, that there is a line which even Christian

charity never passes. I became morose; and from that time I devoted myself to my home."

"And my father? But I am impertinent, and this distresses you."

"No, no. Your father would have had me feel as formerly; but it was impossible. I believe I did what was right. I sacrificed my days entirely to the penance I had vowed to perform. And what do you suppose was my reward?"

"I have heard something of that too, but perhaps incorrectly."

"In two years my wife left me,—left me for a man of her own position in life. It was irksome, I presume, to play the lady any longer. She left me and the child, whom I believe not to be my own, and whom I was bound in law to acknowledge and support."

"And what has become, then, of your heir, of whom I have heard much in the same vague manner that I have heard the rest of your history?"

"He grew up vicious and vulgar at heart, with the handsomest person you can well conceive. Everything was done for him that could be done by education and restraint, to

no purpose. I confess I disliked him, but I did all I could to eradicate his want of truth, his innate vice, his hardness and selfishness, without effect. At length I sent him from me."

"It was indeed unfortunate. Your heir, too."

"No, Deloraine, no. Happily two or three generations of profligate spendthrifts, but gentlemen notwithstanding, had seen fit to cut off the entail. What remains of my property is my own. Had it not been, I would not have been so merciful, for it should not have fallen into the hands of a felon."

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Fetherstone——"

"I mean to say, that after running away to sea, after returning, with promises of amendment that made me anxious once more to give him a start in life, he forged my name to a bill for a thousand pounds, and disappeared for years. To have searched for him would have been useless, to have found him would have been worse. I let him go, I held my tongue; I was not willing, nor am I now willing, that a stain should rest upon us."

"And since that time you know nothing of him?"

"On the contrary, I know he has returned again to England; that he is in a good position—for he has talents, address, and capacity for business. I would not disturb him; but I am informed that he meditates a marriage with a lady in whom you may feel no interest, but whom you will think it your duty to protect."

"I certainly would do so for a stranger," rejoined Deloraine.

"Then you will do so for your old friend Fitzcourthope's memory. It is his ward, a Miss Gray, who has been brought up at the Castle, and who is now likely to fall a victim to the wiles of this worthless vagabond."

Deloraine was unable to reply. Was it possible that this was the solution of the mystery connected with Myra? That this worthless vagabond, as his respected father had called him, could be the man of whom he had heard, and whose prospects he had regarded so lightly? At length he recovered himself sufficiently to inquire whether the supposed lover of Myra Gray bore the name of Fetherstone, or was known by any other.

"When I agreed to ignore his forgery," said Fetherstone, "I made one condition, which was transmitted to him by my agent—that never on any account should he bear the name of my family. He is now no more to me than the merest stranger that walks the streets. I have heard accidentally of his success in obtaining a livelihood. How, when, or where, I know nothing; I care less; the intelligence I have given you came to me by accident; but I believe it to be correct. Can you, or will you, act upon it?"

"I can, and I will," said Deloraine. "Myra Gray is—nothing to me, as you have rightly conjectured; but I know her, and will do my best."

Henry Deloraine put a violent restraint upon himself as he led his guest away to luncheon; and when he had once more seen Richard Fetherstone mounted on his favourite hunter, and on his way home, he sat down by himself to ruminate. That evening he was on his way to Schlagstein *viâ* London and Paris.

I never knew a man in a really great hurry who was not delayed by some ridiculous inad-

vertency; and I have known very few who had philosophy enough to bear it well. Deloraine was no exception to this rule. He was not only a man, but an Irishman; and what with the passports and the *douane*, and the suave but determined resistance of the officers to his irritability, he made matters worse. His French was unfortunately good—as Irish French very frequently is, and the subordinates heard themselves anathematized in very pure and passionate Gallic, instead of in a form of unknown tongue, which might be a compliment as far as either language or manner goes, but for the sulky expression of the victim's face. The train, too, was late in Paris, railway communication being at that epoch newer and worse than it is now, and, instead of getting on to Schlagstein at once, Deloraine was compelled to sleep there.

The next day he started, and got as far as he could by the assistance of a boat, which landed him in the neighbourhood of Schlagstein at too late an hour to disturb a German household. So he was driven to the Pfälzer Hof with one or two more benighted travellers, not fellow-

countrymen. We in England are not so scrupulous as to nocturnal visitors. If a man wants to ask a question at ten o'clock at night, or to light a pipe, or to borrow an umbrella, the chances are the master and mistress are up, and a daughter or two practising for the next *soirée musicale*, or they may be sleeping or quarrelling, but they are still visible to strangers upon an emergency. It is not so in Germany, excepting at Baden-Baden during the race week, and then they are never to be looked for at home. Certainly not in Schlagstein; and Mrs. Montressor, if she kept late hours, kept them with closed shutters. She was, indeed, a pattern of propriety even in a German principality.

But hunger had overcome Deloraine's sense of propriety, if he had any; and he called loudly for a waiter, had the coffee-room relighted, ordered some fresh trout, and a nice little supper to be prepared, and topped up the whole with a bottle of Hocheimer and one of his own cigars, before he put himself under his eider-down cushion; that eider-down cushion being the most uneasy tumble down substitute for a counterpane or quilt yet discovered.

Deloraine, however, managed to sleep under it, and the sun was high in Schlagstein, and clearer than in England, when he awoke.

Deloraine had not been dreaming, but he lay awake some time arranging his plans. He was not quite certain that he was right in coming at all. Suppose, after all, this was the wrong man. Suppose he had no connection at all with the roving and unprincipled vagabond, whose name, or assumed name, Richard Fetherstone did not know. The details which he had filled up at luncheon gave him a fair reason for thinking it possible that they were the same, and his information had come from a most reliable source. It was the joint product of two such forces as the agent who had previously detected him, and the private officer who was employed to keep his eye on him. He was engaged in a bank, too, a very pretty place to have wriggled himself into; and the meagre account which had been received in England of Gilbert Ferrers recorded something of this kind to his advantage. Myra Gray had been induced to say something handsome of his position in the mercantile world, and that had resolved itself into a high and con-

fidential situation in a banking company. She meant it to sound respectable, and her friends in England only turned up their noses at it. However, it was a clue.

But Deloraine was not quite certain of his own motives. He really had been very fond of the girl, as a girl. Very little more encouragement, and time, would have probably brought about a proposal. Nothing but her precipitate retreat from England under the care of a *quasi* governess did postpone it. He had always thought of Myra Gray in her absence as the possible mistress of Mount Rasselas, and would only have waited to see whether she realised in the present what she promised in the past.

And now he had undertaken to do what? First to ascertain that the man about whom this girl had written rhapsodically to her friends, was identical with a base-born rascal, quite unfit for her, whatever his monetary advantages. Secondly, to explain to her that it was necessary for her future happiness and respectability that she should think no more about him. And, thirdly, to induce her to leave Schlagstein with him as her natural guardian, in order that

she and her few thousands, which she had become possessed of in opposition to every natural and rational conjecture, might be put out of harm's way.

"Quite right she should come," said he to himself, dressing; "but whether I'm the right man in the right place here is another question."

Having all this on his mind—and Deloraine had plenty of mind to carry it—he found endless modes of address and measures to which he thought she must bend. His reasons would be strong and firmly stated: and though he was really a young man, what with the authority he carried, and the natural powers of dealing with skittish females for which he gave himself credit, he had no doubt of success. At that moment, too, he recollected that the governess whom he had seen with Myra at the ruins in Ireland, must be invited to accompany her, as well as her maid, for propriety sake, if not to speak the language for them. "What was the woman's name? Mathilde." He had not forgotten her or her face; and a very cold, uncomfortable perspiration broke over the forehead of Henry Deloraine, though it was by no means a hot day.

For the first time he began to have glimpses of where he had seen her. It has been said that, notwithstanding much excellent promise, Deloraine had had his gay moments. He had been twitted with them and envied for them. On one occasion he had dined—dined at Greenwich, not in the public room. His *convives* had been a literary man, an actor or two (for Deloraine affected the stage), an artist of some reputation, and two other artistes of less reputation. Mathilde had been one of them. She had made a great impression upon him at the time; and he had seen her afterwards with an exceedingly handsome man in close attendance. A mysterious ignorance attached to her; and no one seemed to know much of her: but her magnificent beauty, and her wit and *abandon*, made her the *lionne* of the evening. Her return from the dinner party was, as her arrival, as the shadow of one of the ladies in question. Mathilde was said to be an unsuccessful candidate for the honours of the stage; but she was said, too, to be under the protection of a handsome *inconnu*, at present under a cloud. Deloraine had never seen her since.

And this was the governess to whose care Myra Gray had been committed. Deloraine went down-stairs with a very sober step.

A German landlord is frequently, almost always, a communicative person, stopping to talk to his customers in the coffee-room, and with his own countrymen often sitting down to dominoes and a bottle of wine. With strangers he is less familiar; but being to a certain extent a well-educated man, he is always ready, and generally desirous, of entering into conversation. Englishmen he knows to be shy, and unaccustomed to be approached in this wise; but he never puts it down to the true cause—which is, that an innkeeper in this country is no companion, but on the subjects of wine and horseflesh, for an educated gentleman. His manners are different, and his tone immeasurably below most of those who frequent his house. Where the landlord and the guests approximate in mind and manners, there is no such distinction.

Herr Faustmann was no exception to this rule. When Deloraine came down to his breakfast, the large room was deserted, and the long cloth

was already laid for the one o'clock *table d'hôte.* I said deserted. One burly individual, besides the waiter, walked up and down. Occasionally he stopped at the window, looked out of it, took a penknife from his pocket and cleaned his nails, an operation which seemed to lighten his heart, for he straightway began to whistle an air from Figaro's "Hockzeit;" which was changed when Deloraine appeared to a low murmur of the popular melody "Keine Ruhe bei Tag und Nacht," better known here as "Notte, giorno, faticar."

"Good morning," said the landlord in French.

"Good morning," replied Deloraine in the same. "Breakfast, if you please."

The landlord continued his walk while Deloraine ate.

There is another thing that all Germans, innkeepers and their waiters especially, will do, if you allow them the opportunity. They will take occasion to practise language; and no fear of ridicule ever restrains them from addressing you in execrable English. Many speak exceedingly well; but capability seems to be no measure of their persistence. The worse the

pronunciation, the more heinously German the idiom, the more constantly will they urge it.

"Monsieur will be so good as to tell me whether a Madame Montressor lives in Schlagstein, and if so where she may be found." It was said in French, but had it been spoken in the purest Viennese or Hanoverian, the reply would have been the same.

"The Herr is an Englishman?" inquired Monsieur Faustmann, who had already ascertained that fact by unmistakable signs. Deloraine bowed. "Ach, yes. Madame is English —a fine, handsome, dicker Frau; loafly womans. Monsieur will want to see Mrs. Montressor." The German is also impertinently curious. "Monsieur Montressor, perhaps?"

"I have not that pleasure," said Deloraine, laughing.

"Ha, ha! you are right, sare. It must be great pleasure. Monsieur lives in England always, and Madame in Schlagstein."

"And where in Schlagstein, may I ask?"

"Letter L, numero dirty-one. But monsieur will be very comfortable here. We have all the great Reisenders comes here. Monsieur will

dine at von o'clock—no; then from the *carte*, later, perhaps?"

"Perhaps; but it depends on circumstances. At all events, I shall return. Mrs. Montressor I believe, has a *pension* for ladies?"

"Yes; dere is one, three, five. Four is German, and one is a compatriot of monsieur. Ach, but she is pretty—oh, so loafly! but—excuse me, sare—she is make one great scandal. Ah! dat Fraülein Myra——"

"Myra! Miss Gray, do you mean?" and Deloraine almost guessed what had come to pass. There was no one in the room but himself and his communicative host.

"Yees, Meese Gray. You have not heard?" inquired Monsieur Faustmann.

"I only arrived late last night," said he, bursting with impatience.

"Dat is true. You shall know all. Meese Gray is gone; leave de old lady in de hole." For which expression he had to thank some young Englishman of the past year, more forcible than elegant in his language.

"Left her, Mrs. Montressor, for England? Then she is gone to England?"

"Ah! that cannot one say. It depends—there is always a monsieur."

"A monsieur!—who? When did it happen, tell me? I am interested in this lady's fate," and Deloraine rose from his chair impatiently; but the German was not to be hurried into any language but English.

"Ah, monsieur is interest. Then I tell you. Vor yestern vas the last of the Schützen Fest. All the town leave, and among them Meese Gray and an English monsieur, who forgot to pay me his leetle bill. Bot that shall be right. Dere is his name," added he, producing his book. "Vot you call him, Gilbert Ferrers. He is nice young man. Dey is gone togeder, and Miss Mathilde von Robeck is gone too." But Deloraine scarcely heard him to the end. He walked rapidly down the street, without knowing where he was going, till he met a man who directed him to L, numero thirty-one.

The intelligence was confirmed by Mrs. Montressor, that the marriage had been solemnised in Frankfort, two days before Deloraine's arrival; that the letters which had been written to him by Myra Gray and herself

had been sent to his club in London, where, of course, in his hurry, he had not called for them; and that the young lady had declared her complete happiness, and unalterable determination to please herself in the matter of a husband.

That Mrs. Montressor had tried to restrain her, had she had the opportunity, there can be no doubt; and as Mathilde was gone from Mrs. Montressor's after witnessing the ceremony, there was no one on whom to vent his disappointment. He behaved, therefore, with as much philosophy as was to be expected from any man who had gone to Schlagstein for nothing, and, wishing Mrs. Montressor a good day, returned to his inn.

He had never felt so much in love with Myra Gray as at this moment; which, to say the least of it, is very Irish.

It was quite true. They were gone, just as Herr Faustmann had said, and were married; and Mathilde had gone with them, and returned for a night to the despairing Montressor, and had then deserted her with a calmness and cruelty of which she, as well as many others, was capable.

The escapade was a nine days' wonder in Schlagstein. In London, with his employers, the resignation of Gilbert Ferrers was a source not only of astonishment, but, for the moment, of considerable regret.

CHAPTER III.

MR. AND MRS. FERRERS COME TO TOWN FOR THE SEASON.

THE season was again at its height. In other words, six months more having passed over the heads of its votaries, the follies, luxuries, extravagancies, and therefore the vices, of fashion had well-nigh doubled. As carriages rolled through the streets, as trains swept the crossings, saving some trouble to the sweepers and not much defrauding them of their revenue, as club-houses, theatres, French opera, opened in increased numbers, all golden and glowing within, it became manifest to all that England was more wealthy, and therefore Englishmen more enviable, than ever. How her riches and her luxury shut out her poverty

and crime from unobservant eyes! How pleasantly we turn to the gilded equipages and rampant horses from the bespattered beggars that grovel beside them! Beggar! egad, sir, what do we pay a police for? To catch thieves, to prevent crime, to detect murder. Oh! unsophisticated noodle, where do you come from? The wilds of Paris, or some equally benighted region of the Continent, where your theory is reduced to practice? No, sir. To catch beggars, and hide them away from the sight of us, who might be offended by their unspoken supplication. To knock down apple-stalls. To remove obstructions. To make love to our cooks; and to clear the streets on a drawing-room day.

To return. The town was very gay, very bright, very cheerful, and very vicious east of Temple Bar. The feeling, too, of our fine ladies and gentlemen had begun to be hurt. It was clear that the old dandy, your veritable *roué*, your club-man, was going out. The names of the well-dressed loungers no longer sounded so long or so well, nor looked so handsome on the book of the West-end tradesmen, as heretofore. There were more Smiths, and Joneses, and

Robinsons among the Howards, the Percies, and the Somersets. And why not? Well, I will tell you "why not." Because it made luxury and dress and elegance common; there was no mere hole and corner gambling, and debt, and ruin; it was beginning to be wholesale; and there the eyes of the world would look on, and the tongues of that vile press would wag. When everybody wants to go to the devil, it is high time to put a pike on the road. And the few feared this pike exceedingly. It was almost worth while to begin to live cleanly, said the few.

But not so the many. Merchants became rich, bankers became rich, stockbrokers the same. Men who had brains, and used them, made money, heaps of money, and did not put it by. There are two things for which such men might put it by—the eldest boy or a rainy day. The eldest boy seldom repays you, the rainy day does. But these people would spend it. They had no thought for the panic. Many of them, too, had good taste, good wives, good horses, good music, good pictures. They had not all been at Eton or Harrow, so it could

not have been the spread of education, as Viscount Billington observed to Hawbuck, with his usual profundity. "Australian gold," replies Hawbuck, epigrammatically. "Australian manners," replies the other, with a sentiment attached to it which is better understood than expressed.

Be all this as it may, London was very full of money and people; and for some years the City had been treading on the heels of the West-end in spending it. It has come to a crisis now, and the swells have accepted it, as they were bound to do. They give and are given in marriage. If you want blood, go and buy it. It is just as saleable as butchers' meat, and does not feed the hungry.

Of course, too, among the couples, for there's a fair element of conjugal felicity in Mayfair, some were more remarkable than others; newer, perhaps, and better looking. One pair burst upon the town with every possible apparent advantage. They were at once admitted by the ὁι πολλοι, who lounged over the rails or took the air in the Row, to be about as good-looking people as you

could have seen on a summer's day. Soon, too, their horses began to be admired as well as themselves; and to frequenters of the Row, the horses of a man or woman become a sort of property to speculate on.

"Good," says Smith; "what a pretty woman!"

"Moves a bit," says Robinson, meaning, indeed, the near horse in the brougham, a very neat grey out of Mr. Cotterill's yard.

"Well put together," says Jones, not meaning the woman and the horse, but the two horses, who were so; and from that day, Smith, Jones, Robinson, and all their friends and acquaintances look daily for a dark violet brougham picked out with red, drawn by a very neat grey and chestnut, wonderfully fine movers, and containing a beautiful woman, manifestly a lady, not always accompanied by a very handsome man.

"Who the deuce is it? Do you ever see anybody talking to her?"

"No, never. She's very quiet, and drives here in the afternoon; but I never see anybody talking to her."

"Ah! then she isn't a swell. Rhodomontade says she is, and that he's often danced with her, only he's forgotten her name."

"Rhodomontade is such a liar." However, after a day or two, all their minds were relieved. A young banker's clerk, who had put on his very best boots at four o'clock, and had come down to St. James's on a combined mission of business and pleasure, dropped upon Smith, Jones, Robinson, and Rhodomontade just as the neat brougham with the grey and chestnut was pulled up into a walk. "Now I recollect who it is," said Rhodomontade. "By Jove, it's Lady Flora Cleverly. I wonder who she's married. Never saw it in the paper. Haven't the least idea."

"Well, then, I'll tell you, old cock," says the irreverent banker's clerk, at the same time nodding rather familiarly to the male occupant of the brougham. "It's Gilbert Ferrers, and that's his new wife, Miss Gray."

Rhodomontade was done; he was obliged to acquiesce too, for the familiar nod was as powerful in this case as Jove's own.

"And who's Gilbert Ferrers, when he's at home?"

"He was in our house, and now he's director of everything and manager of all the unlimited liabilities in the world. And his wife had loads of tin."

"And where does he live?"

"Oh! Grosvenor Place; at least somewhere about there. He came home in the winter; such jolly pictures he's got, too."

"Then he's very rich? The whole thing looks like money," says another.

"Awful," replies the banker's clerk, who ought to know what riches are.

"Egad! he's a good man to know, then. Might put one in for a good thing or two."

"Of course he could." And this pleasant view of Gilbert Ferrers was taken and acted upon by a great many people, much more influential than Smith, Jones, or Robinson, or even Rhodomontade himself.

This disjointed conversation, however, gives the reader a very good insight into the change that had taken place in Myra Gray and Gilbert Ferrers. One scene, which might have amused

his audience, the little banker's clerk had omitted. It was that which took place between Gilbert Ferrers and his late employers, Messrs. Blunt and Co., upon his renewal of communication with them after his long and very unexpected absence, the termination of which had so much influence upon his position.

As soon as Gilbert Ferrers returned to England after his marriage there were two or three communications, or interviews, absolutely necessary. The most obvious of these was a visit to the bank in which he had been employed, and whose business in his absence he had resigned. Why should he not resign? He saw before him golden harvests, without hard work, from more fields than one; and as his wife had implicit faith in him, and he in his wife's money, there need be no conscientious scruples about throwing up a source of income. Besides which, it was quite incompatible with his present intentions. They took a far more extensive range.

"Good morning, Mr. Blunt," said Gilbert, walking into the office with as much *sang froid* as if he had never omitted a day's work since

he last quitted it for his autumn trip to Schlagstein. "I'm afraid my unexpected absence must have caused you some inconvenience." To do Gilbert Ferrers justice, he had no swagger about him. He was cool, impertinent, imperturbable; but he neither haw-hawed, nor stroked his moustache, nor stood with his hands in his pocket, nor even smiled grimly, as almost all the vicious people in novels have lately taken to doing. Mr. Blunt, too, was by way of being a religious man; by which term I don't mean that he went to church more frequently than his partners, or knelt down three times a day in his parlour, the windows being open; but that his name was somewhat ostentatiously displayed in the lists of our charities and church building societies, and that his conversation had a sort of stern moral flavour about it, which seldom degenerated into feeling or temper. So Mr. Blunt rubbed his hands, and, pointing to a seat, replied, "Not in the least, Mr. Ferrers. You went about our business, to ascertain what you could on the subject of Miss Gray and her property."

"And I think you may add that I acted very

scrupulously in the matter with regard to your interests."

"And to your own."

"Undoubtedly. They supersede every other in the eye of the world. You must know that, Mr. Blunt, with your experience." This was said with much good-humour, as though the speaker had been paying a compliment.

"There are higher interests, sir, to which, let us hope, some men, however immersed in business, are accustomed to look." Mr. Blunt looked up, and Gilbert Ferrers looked down, repressing with difficulty a faint smile. He certainly understood the old gentleman's allusion; but he would not have believed in its reality if the Archbishop of Canterbury had been the speaker.

"I made Miss Gray's interests identical with my own by marrying her, which must be the best possible guarantee to you that every circumstance connected with pecuniary arrangements is most satisfactory." If Mr. Blunt had had any sense of humour he ought to have laughed, the coolness of the tangible syllogism being almost witty. "But I came this morning

to ask a favour at your hands. You've known me a long time as a man of business. I am about to enter very actively into City life. You see this list." And here he presented a paper containing the heads of certain companies and undertakings, some of which were already floating, and others in a state of nudity ready for a plunge. "In this especially, as it involves banking and discount business, you can be of great service to me."

"Sir—Mr. Ferrers," said Mr. Blunt, who could not know that Gilbert Ferrers had come down to the bank in one of the best appointed broughams in London, which was waiting to carry him eastward, "you seem to have forgotten our relative positions." And a flush of very meek anger was visible on his cheek.

"I make a point of forgetting everything as soon as it has ceased to be of use. Without saying a word to offend you or your partners, the recollection of anything that has gone before will be a burden to me. I am beginning the world."

Mr. Blunt put on some spectacles; and he wanted them for two purposes, to conceal his surprise, and to see his way in the dark.

"But does it not occur to you, Mr. Ferrers, that it will be impossible for a house like this to further schemes, at best highly speculative, at their worst ruinous to their shareholders?"

"I should have thought—and, to tell you the truth, that's why I came to you first—that this was exactly the house to have done so."

"On what grounds, sir, on — on — what grounds, may I ask, do you—do you—make that—I would say, form that opinion?" Mr. Blunt was stammering a little.

"By my experience of its former proceedings." This was said in the same tone of voice as if Mr. Ferrers had been asking Mr. Blunt to a family dinner. Mr. Blunt, however, with all his self-command, Christian patience into the bargain, rose from his chair, probably hoping that the interview would terminate soon. So did Gilbert Ferrers rise from his chair, but it was only to approach nearer to Mr. Blunt, and to rest his elbow on the mantelpiece, for the day was cold. "I think, sir, since you have been connected with our house, you have never been engaged in a commerce which—which—which—

ah! warrants the liberty you take in speaking of your experience of its proceedings."

"Now, Mr. Blunt, excuse me, but experience is of two kinds, personal and collateral; and, as lawyers are justified in preferring good circumstantial evidence to any other, I shall follow the same principle in the present case. Besides this, it can be put to the test." Mr. Blunt had lost the tinge of temper, and had become rather white; he was cold too, for he leant over the fire and warmed his hands, looking meantime into the back of the grate or up the chimney. "Do you remember the failure of Buncombe and Starleigh?"

"Stay," said Mr. Blunt, not waiting for the rest of the sentence, and recalled from his contemplation of smoke to a stern reality. "Stay, Mr. Ferrers, that was during the panic."

"Of course it was; for I never forget what I find it useful to remember until I've done with it. It was during the panic. You were then irretrievably bankrupt; but a happy genius for figures pointed out that by very fortunate circumstances indeed, if the secret could be kept, you might go on, living and skating upon

thin ice, if you did not stand still." Mr. Blunt's face was very white now; he laughed, however, feebly. "And how, sir, did you find out this story?"

"In the simplest possible way. It was necessary in one of our rather delicate negotiations, and in which I acted as confidential clerk, to refer to some documents from your archives: I got hold of the wrong ones. I am as curious as a beagle on a cold scent; and I traced your position from that day. I know what it is now, and if I were to go into the City to-morrow——"

"Mr. Ferrers!" And Mr. Blunt was now trembling, not with that divine or sacred excitement which is descriptive of the pious man at the disclosure of villainy, but rather with a sort of impression that he stood in the presence of a modern Pythia; that the oracular vapours were coming up from below, and confounding his pre-conceived notions of indelible secrecy. "Mr. Ferrers, do you mean to say that you would proclaim—— There, sir, suppose for one moment that what you say was true, where would your character be, if a confidential

clerk——" And he paused to give effect to his suggestion.

"You jump to extraordinary conclusions, Mr. Blunt. I should not do so for more valid reasons. You hold the securities for Mrs. Gilbert Ferrers' property, which I am going to invest, when you have given me the assistance I propose to ask. I shall not remove them from you, which, with my knowledge, is liberal, for you would now pay about fourteen shillings in the pound." Blunt's face was a study for a painter of chalk. "You will look over the list I have given you, my dear sir; and, as I think you will be able, by your name, which is so high, and by your advice, which is so valuable, to put me on the direction of those two or three things which I have specially marked; our obligations will be mutual."

"What you propose, sir, is simply ridiculous. How long will it be before these bubbles burst? and then where is the respectability of our firm gone to?"

"You mean what are you to get by it? I'll tell you; your present calculation wants six more years to free you from your liabilities.

With your knowledge of these companies you can do it in three. Why should your names appear other than as *bonâ fide* shareholders? When Walpole tried to stem the popular current for South Sea Stock and failed, he bought and turned a hundred thousand pounds in spite of his convictions. Yet Walpole was an hon—— well! no, that was Brutus; but there's the list, Mr. Blunt. You're safe enough with me. I've nothing to gain by injuring you. If I had, perhaps I should do it; but wanton mischief is the malice of fools. There are the lists, names already got, proposed schemes, and terms; read them carefully, and do the best you can for me." Here Gilbert Ferrers took his hat, and with a hasty "good morning" made for the door. "Stupid old fool! if he plays his cards well I've half made his fortune," with which Christian sentiment of doing to others as you would be done by, he got into the very neat brougham and directed it to Red Lion Square.

At the corner of the square Gilbert Ferrers got out and walked, and, turning down a small dismal-looking street, he went up to a dirty door and rang the bell. He might have saved him-

self, I should say the office-boy, the trouble, for a brass plate above it told him where Mr. Percy Hardman, or Mr. Hardman, jun., lived. Not that that gentleman need have been at all afraid of being mistaken for his father, who was a steady, respectable, well-to-do solicitor in the neighbourhood of the Royal Exchange, something given to safe speculation and money-lending, the latter at no exorbitant interest, and therefore at no great risk of money or of character. Mr. Percy Hardman was regaling himself with a strong pipe of cavendish and some warm gin-and-water, though still early morning, in a back room on the first-floor, to which Gilbert Ferrers had been directed.

These were not his own tastes, though he was anything but refined; they did not happen to be so. It was his use now to prefer claret and good cigars. When, however, his friend offered him a pipe he did not decline it, though he said "no" to the hot gin-and-water.

"Ferrers, so you're in town again; a great swell, I hear."

This beginning of home pleasantries Ferrers

was prepared for, and turned it aside, as a skilful fencer, with an indirect parry.

"And how did you get off with the milking process for the Cambridgeshire?"

"D—— it, it didn't come off. Of course, when Termagant was done with he went down a bit, and I might have hedged then by backing him; but they found out the little game, and Trapman got the sack. The horse won. You must have seen it."

Ferrers laughed rather sarcastically when he said—

"I was too much in love at the time to see anything. I had not laid a shilling against him, and forgot the race till this moment altogether. I'd advise you to cut it. The other's a safer game. What has been done?"

"There's a list for the Slaughterton loop of the London and Smasham. Lots of good names," and he handed the paper over to Ferrers, which, if my publisher paid me by the line, I should make a point of transcribing.

"I don't see any fat aldermen or great City people among them. Your father might have done something for it in that way."

"City people? No; I should rather guess not. See any green?" This had reference to his eye, to which he pointed; and it was not easy to see anything but a bloodshot red. "No, no; we've been to the West-end. Look there, and there, and there; and here's the Bayswater and Baker Street districts—there's Indian names for you; whole lacs of rupees, Ferrers. They don't understand business. Lor! a fellow like you on the direction—say chairman, perhaps—can bother their lives out. Besides, as long as they get a dividend, they won't ask any question." And talking thus, he proceeded to draw out from his desk more papers, programmes of the like pretty nature, and to lay before Ferrers lists of shareholders who he knew himself to be moneyed men.

"And have you done anything yourself?"

"I'm only just come home; but I've done something, I think, this morning. I've set Blunt and Co. to work on our behalf; and I fancy there are few better names to begin with as bankers."

Mr. Percy Hardman's face assumed a broad stare of incredulity.

"You may stare," said the other, putting down his pipe, and knocking out the ashes, "but it's true, and you'll hear of it before long. Now, what's the address? Shorter's Court? that's an ominous name; however, I'm off, and I shall not let the grass grow under my feet, I assure you." He was just about to leave Mr. Hardman, when he turned suddenly round and said, "By-the-bye, you'll want something for yourself and your friends—I mean some of the small men; the labourer's worthy of his hire. Secretary, or something of that sort?"

"Hem—ha—secretary," said Mr. Hardman, biting the top of his pen. "Well, thanks, that's very kind of you; but I think not. None of these things, you know, are meant to last longer than it's convenient; and I always notice that the secretary, poor devil, comes in for all the shareholders' abuse, when the swells have got out of the way. No. I think not; but if you'll leave us to ourselves, we shall find some very pretty pickings, I dare say, without spoiling our reputation. Secretary! no, no. It 'ud only be four or five hundred a year while it lasts. Give it an enemy."

The two could afford to laugh at this joke, and did so heartily; and then Gilbert Ferrers sent his brougham back, and pursued his way into the City, where he began his labours.

CHAPTER IV.

MYRA'S INTRODUCTION TO SOCIETY.

SOCIETY, or the world, or whatever one calls that miscellaneous crowd which comes to London just when fresh sunshine and flowers show themselves in the country, and leaves it when a parched or drooping glory is settling upon both, may be divided into two distinct parties: the Upper Ten (a name whose snobbism its members would be the first to repudiate), and the immediate followers of the aristocratic order, in enjoyment of this Athenian misnomer. The former of these two divisions is the recognised leader of fashion. It enjoys what it really possesses; not a monopoly, but a very strong element of the beauty, the honour (the *decus* and

the *decor*), the greatness, personal and collateral, of England. It has vast wealth, power, intelligence, advantages of education, and prestige; and it will be a long time, a great many generations, let us hope, before the English *people* shall shut its eyes to the beauty of an aristocracy combining hereditary birth, statesmanship, and character. It goes to Court, it has carriages, horses, dresses, opera-boxes, French cooks, and valets, as things of course. If it will be content with these, and some of the good things of political power, giving to its rival a fair share of well-earned distinction in political, official, diplomatic, military, or naval life, it will continue long to possess them. "Si malè recalcitrat," if it is obstinate, if it will not yield a point where the battle is well contested, perhaps its belongings may go by the board. It may lose both: a helpless and withered Faubourg St. Germain in the whirl of a fighting, struggling, money-making, blood-thirsting Paris.

The latter of these two divisions is, in habit of body, almost identical with the former. It loves to be so. In habit of mind it is distinct. It has all things, not *of course*, but by reason of

its power of wealth. It has beauty, because God made it, as he did the Lancashire witches. It has intellect and education, because it has been struggling, and successfully, to cultivate them. It goes to Court, too, sometimes, but certainly not *of course*. It has carriages, horses, dresses, opera-boxes too; but why? Not because those things belong to it of right, but because that great world has them, and it would not do to be left behind. Imitation is its offensively characteristic attribute. The Duchess of A—— has diamonds, Mrs. Tom B—— will have some too; that's a common ground with a duchess. The Marchioness of C—— has a pagoda of yellow hair, very inconvenient to carry, right on the top of her head: Mrs. Jim D—— will have the same, and Truefitt profits by her extravagant appreciation of exceptional want of taste. Mrs. Jim D—— does the marchioness henceforth. The Countess of E—— has a lovely figure—imposing, grand, Juno-like; does not object to cigar ends and filth on her robe, so long as it only trails after her down the Row; and has a new dress about every third day. Mrs. Harry F—— has a short,

fat, vulgar figure, but heaps of money, and is not to be beat in costliness of apparel or weight of dirt by any countess in England. There is no flattery equal to imitation. When countesses become indelicate about the neck, or back, or shoulders, Mrs. Jones, the bank director's wife, strips herself to the waist. Duchesses with good feet will parade them for half an hour here or there in a short dress, many coloured and piquant. Straightway Mrs. Smith (I beg pardon, Smythe), the great bill discounter's lady, exposes, *crurum tenus*, those pedestals of hers, on which the weight of her husband's guilt might almost repose.

These two bodies, closely fitted and aptly joined in some things, are in others widely asunder as the poles. They know nothing about each other, their virtues or their vices; and the one would rather imitate the vices of the other than imitate nothing at all. Yet this brings them no nearer together; indeed, it tends rather to increase the width of separation; for nobody likes to be caricatured, whatever may be their sentiment of a pleasing likeness. If the better half of each of these classes knew one another better, as

they infallibly must do in course of time, they would indeed be better friends. At present they stare at one another through the same *lorgnettes*, but with what different eyes! They look at one another from the same carriages; and the one says, "I wonder who made that bonnet?" the other, "What did that odious woman give for those horses?"

But there is a third division, hanging, hovering, on the confines of either—the better class of commerce, the less pretentious class of that oligarchy. They are admitted on both sides of the barrier, and learn a lesson of wisdom from both. These men know that fusion must take place between the two. They see the thin edge of intellect inserting itself, and they see—what they do not like, but must acknowledge—the great mass of wealth come crashing down, a palpable, tangible power, which will have place; a thing of specific gravity not to be withstood. And the reason why the English aristocracy has stood its ground, and will stand its ground, is the union of strength it derives from all three.

Myra Ferrers knew well enough to which of

right she belonged. Her father was a gentleman of high character and ancient lineage; the few relations she had heard of bore testimony to this fact, even to the old aunt in the West. Her mother was a lady; Lord Fitzcourthope had always told her so; and she herself had been bred up by one of the highest bred persons in Ireland. Lord Fitzcourthope had not impoverished his blood with his estate; and Myra knew, without telling, that no *parvenu* would have been his ward or *protegée*.

But a very disagreeable truth had forced itself upon Myra soon after her marriage. Her husband was certainly not what she had expected; more certainly, not what he had represented himself to be. And having disappointed her, she was apt to visit him with the full force of her own self-delusion as well as his treachery. The great point of Myra's character was her truth; and the fact of feeling no suspicion laid her open to the machinations of two such persons as Mathilde and Gilbert Ferrers. Myra had implicitly believed the latter, and allowed her mind to be warped or misformed by the former. When she ran away with her lover,

she had seen nothing untruthful or deceitful in such conduct; she would have laughed at the corollary of Brabantio, "She hath deceived her father, and may thee." It did not follow in her mind as a conclusion of such premises at all.

When Lord Fitzcourthope died, she became rather frightened at the prospect of being separated from Gilbert Ferrers by the great bugbear Chancery; truly to her and most people a magnificent unknown. Her fears were acted upon by Gilbert Ferrers; and the unhappy *abandon*, or unselfishness, or utter selfishness of her affection, stood his pleadings in good stead. He had a monitor to urge him forward. Delay to him was death. Immediate possession was as necessary to him as to the simoniacal curate who is about to be married to a penniless parishioner.

Women who run away with men whom they love, are often as true as steel. They act an exceptional part for a great purpose. The dread in many cases of being untrue to their one idea of happiness urges them on. It is the fact that they suborn the maid, give a Judas-like kiss to their old grandmother at night, buy off

the policeman, poison the yard dog, put their night-cap on to the bolster in bed, have a bad head-ache early in the evening, and desire not to be disturbed till late in the morning. But they are not the less truthful in after life, for all that; and pay their butcher's bills, say their prayers, instruct their children in the heinousness of lying, deceive nobody, not even themselves, fear God, and shame the devil.

But the entire indifference to truth in Gilbert Ferrers was so remarkable, that he almost preferred acting or speaking a lie, if it suited his purpose equally well. It was impossible to live a day with him without discovering this. He was scarcely a moral coward, and yet he was so morally, far more than physically; and he soon became afraid of his wife's open speaking. He seemed always to have something to conceal; and he had, and his wife appeared to think so. Still of course she was ignorant of what it could be. But it was a terrible drawback to her happiness; and perhaps no girl ever woke sooner to see that she had trusted a reed which was breaking. It had not yet run into her hand and pierced it. These were early days for that.

As the season advanced, Myra, with girl-like avidity, looked forward to society. Now her notions of society had been formed on a model different from that which was being presented to her daily. The amenities of Courthope Castle were ever present to her as the sort of thing she was to meet with in her own house; but as their dispenser more than as a recipient. "The winter is scarcely over, Myra; nobody ever calls much before May." Myra had no means of refuting this calumny; and the fact of her having no house to receive visitors helped to satisfy her. But now that May had come, and those many thousands so like herself, but not so good-looking, with worse horses and clothes, passed her by without notice. Her father's aunt, Mrs. Treby, was in town, and had called upon her; but Mrs. Treby's visit was stiff and formal, and had been returned as what the old lady had called a Christian duty. The ladies Honoria and Catherine were in Ireland, and not coming to town. Lord Fitzcourthope, the present earl, had met her and stopped her in the Row, had admired her horses, and had called upon her; but when she asked Ferrers to

make a little dinner for him, he had evaded the question.

She had many amusements, and of luxuries no lack. Her husband had at first been very attentive to her, and she felt less want of society. He had been proud of exhibiting her on horseback. Occasionally he had introduced men to her; but as she always found something exceptionable in them, she gave them no encouragement. When his footing seemed firmly established in London, he gave himself less trouble about her. The gentlemen whom she had seen as a girl at Castle Courthope sometimes recognised her, but rarely, for she was very different from the wild Irish girl that had fished with them, and ridden her pony over fences for their amusement. When she did meet them, she would willingly have asked them to dinner, only somehow or other she did not. One day she made the attempt.

"Gilbert, I met an old friend of my guardian's yesterday."

"I'm glad of it. Who's that? Any one I know?"

"Perhaps; Colonel Scarsbrook. I asked him to dinner on Thursday."

Ferrers sat bolt upright in his chair. "Asked him to dinner?"

"Yes; why not? There's no harm in that, I suppose."

"Great harm. You can't have him then."

"Not have him! but I've asked him. And you must ask two or three of your friends to meet him. You know plenty; ask two ladies and a man."

"I'm—I'm going to dine out," said this ready liar.

"You told me, Gilbert, that you were disengaged, and would take me to the theatre. I meant to give up that. But of course if you——"

"I told you before that I didn't like people asked here without being told of it beforehand," saying which, he got up and walked off with a very cold leave-taking. Myra did not repeat the offence.

Now and then they did have company, and they went out; but the women Myra met were not of the class to which she had been accustomed. Some of them approached Mrs. Montressor, with less dignity and less brains, but

more dress. Every now and then she fell in with good-humoured girls, with whom she was on friendly terms, and whom she took out in her carriage, but again her husband's brow darkened.

"Don't get so d——d intimate, Myra,"—he had got to this sort of language already—"with people you don't know anything about. One can always make friends with a carriage and an opera-box; but the d—l himself cannot get rid of them again," which showed more knowledge of the bad side of the world than of the good.

But a change—at all events a modification of this state of things—came about when London was at its fullest, and this poor little woman was beginning to think that she might as well have remained *en pension* with the dignified Montressor and her friend Mathilde, if she was to give up dancing at nineteen, and not even to have the society of her husband in return. It came about very naturally. Lady Mary Thorncliffe was an earl's daughter and the wife of a chief secretary and heir to a marquisate; she was likewise a leader of fashion. She sat in her carriage in the Row, drawn up at the rails, and

by her side sat Mrs. Runnymede, the widow of the late oldest commoner in England, the mother of the present one.

"Look here, Mary. Here comes that pretty creature with the grey and the chestnut. What a lovely face! Who is she?"

"I'll tell you. I heard only yesterday. She was poor Fitzcourthope's ward, Myra Gray. You've heard him speak of her. Lady Honoria didn't like her; so they sent the poor child to Germany to learn the language——"

"Ah, I know. There was a horrid duel or something, and she ran away with the survivor," said Mrs. Runnymede.

"Yes; and I think the survivor is a very lucky fellow. However, Deloraine, who knows all about it, says that she was not to blame; and Scarsbrook says that Ferrers is a great City man, and director and manager of everything, and lives *en prince*. At all events, what's more to the purpose, he's to be put up for the borough of Longpurse at the dissolution, and as Thorncliffe wants to get hold of him, I'm to call."

"That's rather risky, dear; isn't it?"

"Oh, no; not when one knows the women.

The man can't do much harm. Socially they're of little account; politically they're everything."

"Really! Then how ill-natured the people are about you and Thorncliffe! Do you know, Mary, they give you the credit of that appointment to Sweden which gave such awful offence——"

"Do they? Well, I'm glad of it; for it certainly was the stupidest thing—but we must call upon Mrs. Ferrers, and I shall send her my 'at homes.' If you'll come, too, we'll go together."

"Of course, dear, if Deloraine says there's no harm." And so it was settled.

But it may be remarked that Deloraine had not said anyhing of the sort. He only said that Myra Gray was not to blame in the matter.

When Ferrers was first embarked in this sort of affair, he had a reason for submitting. He knew the value of wealth; he wanted it for its own purposes; he had little ambition, but great self-indulgence. As time went on he became ambitious; a new pleasure—not a particularly holy one—urged him, and he embraced it heartily. He found dupes, victims who bled freely, among his West-end acquaintances. His

little dinners now served a great purpose. Names stood him in good stead; for he found some needy patrons who risked sprats to catch herrings. And as to Ferrers, he was sure of the sprat, which for the time was all he cared about.

He had exhibited some curious symptoms of what horse-masters call jibbing at first—not from any shyness, for his manner was self-possessed—almost rudely so; but he hated the West-end; he looked metaphysically out of the side of his head whenever he came west of Temple Bar. The City never seemed to appal him. He knew his people, and they knew him. He was "hail fellow well met" with a duke when he had him in Cheapside, but there always was something mysterious and timid in his recognition of his friends in the Row or on a staircase in Mayfair. He always seemed to be expecting an unpleasant vision, a shadow as of days gone by, and he shirked when he could.

"Myra, I'm sure it's late enough; the carriage is there."

"What name, sir?"

"Oh, never mind the name; I'll walk to it." But suddenly recollecting that the name ap-

peared pretty often when he did not, and that the nights were dark even in Mayfair, he said, "Mrs. Ferrers' carriage;" and when they proposed to tell a policeman to call it, he always had a cold shudder, and a fit of the sulks when he got home.

CHAPTER V.

THE DIRECTOR'S WHITE *BAIT* AT THE WEST-END.

FROM this time Myra's season passed more pleasantly, more in accordance with her preconceived notions of a season; less so with her anticipations of married life. Ferrers was much from home. Business kept him late at the City, and he dined at his club. Business did more: it made him pre-eminently disagreeable when he got home. For some time after his marriage he had put a remarkable restraint on his indifference. He had allowed nature to dictate to him that the company of a beautiful girl who had several thousand pounds to give away was worth something, and that the least he could do was to look pleased and indulge her

inclinations, which were rational; but when, under one form of excuse or another, he had got a great deal of the money, and a power of attorney which enabled him to play with the remainder, he was not a man to throw away his fascinations.

Not that he was cruel, or offensively vulgar and hard. That would have been in his eyes a waste of vice, which to him was much the same as a waste of virtue. He was only indifferent. Sometimes he chose to salute his young wife as he went out or came home. Sometimes he called her "Myra, my dear," sometimes "Mrs. Ferrers," sometimes he expressed his surprise that she could be such a fool. He was occasionally indulgent, bought her a dress or an opera box, but he much more frequently allowed her to cater in such matters for herself; and as Myra had no money, when her husband was ill-tempered, and was obliged to ask when she wanted it, she frequently went without.

But Ferrers, if he shrunk from too close personal contact with the world, wished his name and his wife to be favourably before it. Anything like economy irritated him; and

if Myra were not as expensively dressed as the ladies with whom she associated, he was annoyed.

"You made a guy of yourself last night at Mrs. Crosby's. Where did that dress come from?" he would say, eating his breakfast, without looking off the *Times*.

"Did I? I didn't know it. But I've had the dress some time, and you never noticed it before."

"It looked as if it had been worn often enough. Why not have more, if you want them?"

"But I don't really want them; besides, I can't afford it."

"That's so like a woman, Myra; you can't afford it. Nonsense. Go to Howell and James' and buy yourself a dress; half-a-dozen, if you want them."

"That's very kind of you, Gilbert;" and a pleased smile came into her face, not at the present, so much as at the signs of affection which it conveyed. "And you must leave me the money to pay for them."

"Pay for them! Ha! ha! that's good. What

in the world should you want to pay for them for? Tell them to put them down."

"But I've no bill there." For which she took credit to herself.

"Then the sooner you begin one the better," which dispelled her delusion.

The fact is that Myra Ferrers hated bills of all sorts, and was struggling to keep them down, for some inquietude crept over her about the expenses. Now that the season was ending, people would be importunate; that is, they sent short, civil notes, and one or two had bills to meet, and one or two ruled their prices for ready money; and one very artful old gentleman had dissolved partnership with his brother for at least the twentieth time, and was sorry to be troublesome. How his brother could think of re-entering upon commercial enterprise again with such an unstable partner, I cannot think. Myra knew very little of money for her age, but a great deal of the want of it. She added to a natural love of honesty, and a wish that every man should have his own, which makes so many of us regard women as parsimonious, a terrible dread of the inconveniences of debt. Of imme-

diate difficulty, as yet, there was not a suspicion in her mind. She knew too little of the evanescent nature of a few thousands, which are as speedy in their flight as the bird of Jove. Her own money, which was no longer hers, appeared to her to be ample for present purposes; and it had the advantage of being accessible. And then Gilbert's own resources!

Whenever Myra Ferrers got as far as this, she stopped; and she felt that she coloured involuntarily, not for herself, but for him. What were Gilbert Ferrers' resources? She not only never had known; but the question, and all conversation on the point, was evaded skilfully, but firmly. Her notions of City business were vague enough. What in the name of patience the Director of the Bunkum Railway had to do, whether he had to whistle, or to smoke, both functions belonging to the new mode of locomotion (for it was comparatively new at that time), how was Myra to tell? Did the Manager of the Trente et Quarante Discount Company sit with a bottle of East India Madeira, and a pile of bills in front of him, in a Turkey-carpeted room, ready to pay all the calls it chose to make upon

him? What was the Aërial Communication Company? or the Straits Subterranean Junction Limited Liability Company? or the Self-Consuming Inebriating Liquor Shares for the Abolition of National Intoxication? Something Myra had heard of these, something, too, she had seen of them with her husband's name attached to them, but nothing did she know. One thing she knew, that as to his own position as a man of property or of resources, he had entirely deceived her; and that whereas she had respected as well as loved him dearly ten months before, she only did the latter now—a love, you see, without respect!

The real state of Gilbert Ferrers' affairs was what might be expected in the case of any clever, unscrupulous financier, who goes boldly into the market with a fair amount of ready money capital, and a creditable reputation. Nothing was known of him excepting that he had occupied a confidential position with a banking house of high credit in the commercial world; and that that house had made it its especial business to espouse a promising scheme or two to which Ferrers had given his support,

and, as it seemed, his money. For the reader need not be told that Mr. Blunt had acted on the hint he had received.

Ferrers' days were busy days, there was no doubt about that; but had he been a less extravagant man, they might have been profitable days. He certainly, one way or another, managed to get money. But he spent it a little faster than he got it. His house was splendidly furnished, heaven knows how; his pictures were good, heaven only knows why; his table was excellent, when he dined at home; his carriages, his horses, his wines, his servants, were of the first class; and when he received, he certainly did so with no niggard hand.

It was not very often; and he never walked home unexpectedly with a friend or two, to the sacred fish and joint of our forefathers. That's a bad sign in a City man. I like City men; I like the Stock Exchange; but then I like them out of their work. I like them when they hook me by the arm, and beg me to bend my steps their way, not to mind about my frock coat, but to come home and dine with their Myras. Then

I know I'm in for a good thing and a hearty welcome; and that I shall have plenty of good sense and sound information to digest into the bargain. They won't trouble me much about Bentley's "Phalaris," or Schlegel's dramatic literature; but I can forgive them that for one night in consideration of that excellent Lafitte of "44."

"And you have an opinion of that scheme for bridging the Channel with enormous steamers, Ferrers, and taking us over by rail?"

The ladies, Myra and Mrs. Trustyman, had left the room, and Ferrers, Trustyman, and Colonel Kibobs, an old Indian full of rupees, and young Giltspur of the Fusileers, were over their wine. Kibobs was the speaker.

"I've taken a hundred shares, and they've pushed me into the direction. Xerxes did the same, you know," replies Ferrers, looking at his wine by the light, as being less suspicious than his friends.

"Not exactly," says Giltspur, who had left Eton later than the rest. "His were *flat*-bottomed; and then he barred the rail."

"I should think the steamers might be flat-

bottomed, too," remarked Trustyman, with a husky gravity that became a rich man.

"Very likely indeed," says Giltspur again, with a most indecorous grin, which, however, Ferrers checked immediately by asking if "that last bottle wasn't slightly corked." Down went their noses at once, and the very obvious witticism, not bad for the Fusileer Guards, was got over.

"The only difficulty is money," by-and-by remarks Ferrers again.

"Oh! there's always money to be had in this country, sir," replies the large-hearted Trustyman, "if the thing will hold water."

"I don't know about that. This is a certainty; and we've got all the shares taken for the model to start it. City men have so many irons in the fire, and the West-end—— Well, I suppose they're so rich they can afford to take three and a quarter per cent. instead of seven."

Here Kibobs, who wanted to be a swell, and to bring down Mrs. Kibobs and the girls from Baker Street to Belgravia, pricked up his ears.

"What's your time at the office, Ferrers? I believe it's worth looking into."

"They'll come out at a premium; and the exhibition of the model, if it's never made use of, is calculated to pay all the money back four times over. So that the original shareholders will make a pretty good thing of it, anyhow."

"And did you say to-morrow was your day?" says Trustyman.

"I'm not particular; but if you'll come to me to-morrow, I'll go in with you."

"I'll be with you at two," says Kibobs.

"One more bottle; same vintage, Mr. Trustyman. No? Then shall we go up-stairs to Mrs. Ferrers, who'll give us some tea?"

"And some music," adds Giltspur, lounging out.

"By Gad, that's a Murillo: and one of the best I ever saw." Saying which the Colonel, who was really a judge of pictures, determined upon trusting some of his rupees in the same basket as the man who could afford such pictures and wine as Gilbert Ferrers.

Within four days the shares of the Paris and London Junction Company were up, and among the speculators were several old Indians, a country gentleman or two who hated sea-sick-

ness, and a couple of Guardsmen who came to invest their winnings over the last Grand National Hunt Chase at Market Harborough. Ferrers paid a necessary bill or two, and put a handsome sum into his own pocket by a very early realisation of what he held.

There were plenty of schemes, nothing like as respectable or as probable as this into which the world were plunging in ignorance, and Ferrers and his friends with their eyes open. The scoundrel was perfectly indifferent to the suffering he caused by these efforts, so long as he himself found money to meet his emergencies. For getting to Paris without crossing the Channel he helped to start at least four notable schemes, by which he left his misguided followers in the lurch; making something by his speculation and receiving handsome payments in specie, or its equivalent for his valuable services. Some men were for flying, Icarus or Dædalus like (they would have preferred the latter, of course), and argued that as ponderable bodies are supported by wings, and without much apparent effort propel themselves at great speed, there could be no objection to raising a

few thousands for the promotion of an Aëronautic Expedition Company. Ferrers was the very man for it. How he patted them on the back, who came down to the board-room; how he talked science, which neither he nor they could understand; how he compared air to water, and themselves to——no! he said nothing about gulls. He was chary of admitting his friend Giltspur to this last device for what a facetious, but hard-hit shareholder called "raising the wind."

His friend and coadjutor, Mr. Percy Hardman, brought up a model of a tubular-bridge, which a young engineer, who really knew nothing but that he wanted to marry Percy Hardman's sister, declared to be perfectly feasible. He admitted to a nibbling director, however, that the cost might be thirty-five millions. "Francs?" said the staggered director. "No, pounds," says the civil engineer. So that was abandoned, for even Ferrers thought it better to relinquish the gigantic design. He had to pay the secretary and clerks out of his own pocket; which he did, that is, out of Myra's.

"But if one can't go over," said Mr. Percy

Hardman one fine day, when the world was divided between Scotland, Ireland, Brighton, Torquay, Baden-Baden, and Mentone, "one can go under. Let's have a tunnel, Mr. Ferrers."

"But will you be able to work the scheme at all? It sounds better than flying."

"Yes; we can but try. Between ourselves, I'm in Short Street."

"You're extravagant, Hardman," said Gilbert Ferrers, with a look of pitying virtue; "d——d extravagant. Here's a tenner."

Mr. Hardman put it in his pocket, and answered—"My father's all for a tunnel; he thinks it'ud do."

"*He says* he thinks it would do, you mean."

"Blest if I do. The old bloke's got it into his head that there might be a tunnel. He says there's one a mile long, why not twenty—if ye go deep enough." And Mr. Percy put his hands in his pocket and his head on one side.

"You'll ruin him if you let him go into it."

"That's his business, not mine: I'd better have the money than him."

"No doubt. You mean, however, than *he*; and I do doubt that. You'd get through it too fast.

However, it's nothing to me: he's not my father."

"That's a great misfortune to him." Mr. Percy spoke a little, a very little ironically. "But if you're going huntin', or shootin', or fishin', or anything else that you gallous fash'-nable fellers do go, why just leave it to me for a month or two; and you come and look at it after the winter."

"But I'm not going away."

"You'd better. These City beaks do get so sharp-set in the winter for something to do that if you make a stir just now you'll blow the gaff. And they want all their money to pay Christmas bills. You'd better by half wait, and just give your creditors a breather. You've been d——d sharp on 'em ever since you married." The advice was wonderful, so Gilbert Ferrers determined to follow it.

CHAPTER VI.

MYRA SEES AN OLD FACE IN A NEW LIGHT.

"MY dear, everybody seems leaving town; if you have nothing else to do here I think you had better go somewhere."

It was at the breakfast table that Gilbert Ferrers usually gave the *ordre du jour*. Since he had shaken off that fear which at first beset him, or that disinclination for West-end society, he had found it the most opportune moment for discussion. At night if he was early, Mrs. Ferrers was late, or *vice versâ:* they were never early together, excepting when they had company at home. These little dinners, almost packed dinners a conscientious person would have called them, occurred more frequently; they were usually profitable. Ferrers was an adept

at cards, playing, as he openly avowed, too, with extraordinary success. "I always win: I hold such cards," said he; and he unquestionably did: almost too good. But we were at breakfast.

"I've no engagement after the day after to-morrow. I've promised to dine with Mrs. Penruddock. You know she was a relation of my father's."

"Well, then, I suppose you could start at the end of the week?"

"And where are we to go?" inquired Myra; inclined to be acquiescent to any amount, for the unusual manner in which her husband had spoken to her.

Ferrers hummed and hawed; he hardly knew. So Myra said "Brighton;" upon which he spread his hands out deprecatingly.

"What the deuce could induce you to think of such a thing? It's as bad as London."

Myra looked up, surprised at his vehemence.

"I thought of it because I knew Colonel Scarsbrook and his sister are gone there, and Lady Mary Thorncliffe is going there as soon as she comes back from Scotland."

"What can Lady Mary be to you, or you to her? She will do well enough without you. Brighton, indeed! d—d nonsense."

Myra's face grew a little red, not at the abuse of Brighton, for she was very indifferent to the matter, but to the sense of indignity she suffered in her husband's manner. She made no answer to his rude insinuation; but said, with some warmth—

"Any place is the same to me: choose for yourself if you've a preference."

"It makes no difference to me, as I must be in town."

"In town, Gilbert: not together? Surely you're not in earnest? If you can't go, I'll stay too. I don't mind about the heat."

"You look as if it was oppressing you now." And this unfeeling remark only increased the poor girl's confusion, and the little tear which was settling in the corner of her large light eyes almost ran over.

"Gilbert," and she swallowed it, "I cannot go alone. Think what everybody would say of us, the first year of my marriage!"

"Don't talk nonsense. You are so mon-

strously absurd. Who the devil cares or knows whether it's your first year or your fortieth."

Myra resented this sort of thing, as she always did, by looking with a half-reproachful, half-indignant stare at her husband. It had no effect upon him now, though not unfrequently it proved a far better antidote to his impertinence than words.

"Look here, Myra; you have every luxury, everything a woman can want; but you married a man of business, and you must submit to let me manage mine as I like. If I wish to stay in town it must be done without question——"

"Undoubtedly; but if I am willing to remain too——"

"You don't know what you talk about. The expense——"

"I shall not cost more here than I should taking a house elsewhere,—not so much; unless you're going to let this——"

An idea struck Ferrers.

"I am, and live at the club."

Myra came to her husband.

"Then I'll go, Gilbert, if you wish it. I know we are in debt here, and that is one

reason why I hate leaving town; but if it will relieve you of any difficulties, of course I will go. But where?"

"The west coast; it's the cheapest."

"I can write to Mrs. Treby, to whom I promised a visit whenever I was in that part of England. Perhaps I can find something for three or four months, or for the winter, in her neighbourhood, and you can come down from Friday till Monday or Tuesday."

"You don't know what I have to do."

"Then give up all these amusements and luxuries, and do upon less work and less pleasure."

As Myra went out that morning she felt more like her old self, and looked at Ferrers more from the old point of view than she had done for months past.

It is a melancholy fact that a woman, not yet twenty years of age, had tied herself to a man whom she is bound to love, honour, and obey, with scarcely a quality calculated to command either love, honour, or obedience, excepting physical power. Yet such was Myra's case, and a very hard and uncommon lot was hers. She

had loved not wisely, and therefore too well. She had thrown her love and herself away upon an idea—a childish, romantic fancy; upon a morbid admiration for the unknown, which had been cherished by a mass of exceptional circumstances, and now she was suffering for it. She never had been disobedient. She had been wayward; a little self-willed; had been a little spoiled; very much injured, cajoled, deceived; and wanted a brother or a mother's care; all her life she had wanted a woman friend. Lady Honoria Berrylands and her sister were not bad women, but simply unsympathetic.

It was unfortunate, or fortunate, for Myra, as the case may be, that Ferrers was not long in letting her discover his utter disregard of truth; and Myra, without exhibiting, could not help feeling a strange repugnance to the contradictory of her favourite characteristic. Lying for a great object, though utterly indefensible, is sometimes excusable. Even she would almost have admitted that. Lying, with no object but that of deceiving your wife, or your neighbour, a weak and foolish woman, perhaps, was in her eyes mean, contemptible, worthy only of a child

or a coward, and in them most unworthy. The fact was Ferrers was a coward. He had once confronted death, and might do so again; but so will any one driven into a corner, and then he was within less than I dare say of running away.

Amongst other things, when they first came to London, Myra wanted money. It was too early to refuse, but it was inconvenient to Ferrers to comply. Might she have a little of her own, which was lying at Blunt and Co.'s. Well! it was not easy for a week or two: for, said Gilbert Ferrers, the money is not deposited, and I have been spending a great deal of my own. On that day, during Ferrers' absence, a clerk from Messrs. Blunt's arrived, bearing with him some papers for Myra to sign. "One document, a mere matter of form," said the clerk, "went to show that the money had been received, and was to be returned to Mr. Deloraine or to Lord Fitzcourthope's solicitors." "But," argued Myra, "you know, Mr. Smith, that the money has not been received." "Indeed, madam, I beg your pardon. The money has been in our hands three weeks, and some has already been with-

drawn by Mr. Ferrers, under a power of attorney, for an investment elsewhere; he seeks the same for the remainder." It made a strong impression on Myra. "Gilbert, Gilbert, what had you to fear! Have I ever refused you anything?"

But she was at this moment desperately unhappy about her debts. She saw that Ferrers with all his extravagance, and with all the ready money he could command, was frequently at a loss for small sums. She had kept down the household expenses and her personal comforts, taking care to have as few of those debts as possible. Whenever she spoke to Ferrers about his furniture, or his pictures, or his china —and she never feared to express her dislike to his extravagance—he always turned off her importunities by some subterfuge or bravado. The first disgusted her, the second shocked her.

Many mornings she pored over her bills and her books. They were all clear enough, but she saw that she could not pay them with the money she had. There would have been some comfort in taking counsel with somebody, but there was not a woman of her acquaintance whom she

could consult; and as to men, that of course was out of the question. Mathilde, Deloraine, and her poor dear Lord Fitzcourthope came into her head all at once; the latter as a financier was almost a joke; but Mathilde was a clever woman, and had always been a manager, and not a niggard either; and as to Deloraine, the less she saw of him the more she would like to have seen. He had been in town, and had never called. She guessed only half of the reason why.

She had somewhat lost her spirits. Is it to be wondered at? With all her acquaintance Myra had not a friend. And she dreaded those dreary single knocks, and those blue wafered envelopes, and the obsequious tradesmen, whom she was almost ashamed to look in the face, as they bowed her to the violet and red brougham with the chestnut and the grey. It was something, however, to know that she was going to economise; so she sat down and wrote to Mrs. Treby, who certainly had no objection to receive Myra and her maid; but who would not have been at home to her husband on any account, whom she rightly ima-

gined to be a simple adventurer. She kept it to herself; but when she saw her great niece, and heard the open-hearted simplicity of the girl, and her honest, practical good sense on every subject but the one which had settled her happiness in this world, she didn't wish to see Mr. Ferrers, for fear of liking him or hating him too much.

"Are you going on Friday or Saturday to Tenby?" inquired Ferrers.

"Neither, of course. I said the end of the week; but since then I've written to my aunt to receive me. If it had been Brighton now, or——"

"D—n Brighton! I thought you only meant to stay to dine with Mrs. Penruddock."

"That was my reason; but as you are going to let the house, and I am going for some time, and a longer journey, there was more to do. That's all. I cannot go on Saturday."

Gilbert Ferrers turned for consolation to the money article. He did not seem to get it, for his face, handsome as ever, was not so pleasant as sometimes. He dropped the paper, and rang the bell hastily.

"Get me a cab—a hansom."

"Yes, sir."

"I shall not be home to dinner, and Mrs. Ferrers dines out."

"Yes, sir;" and the man went out to send the footman to call a cab.

"Then I shall not see you to-day, Gilbert?" said Myra.

"Probably not, as you are going one way and I another."

"I wish we were going together," said Myra, who could not give him up.

"Mrs. Penruddock didn't ask me, so that's impossible. Besides, I'm going down to a heavy business dinner at Richmond."

"Richmond! Ah! you promised to take me some day, but we've never been."

"All promises are conditional. Adieu!" and he put on his hat and looked at himself in the glass—"Adieu!" and he went out.

For some reason or other impossible to explain, Myra thought that he was lying; and he was. She found it out later. At present, it troubled her for five minutes, more on his account than her own.

Gilbert Ferrers, with all his good looks, never threw off the Bohemian. He could not be quite the gentleman. The middle-aged loungers and young Guardsmen who came to his house and ate his dinners, backed his horses (for he had a small stud, amongst other things), and bought his shares, saw it at once; and so did his wife, whenever they came together. She had an innate sense of the fitness of things—call it early education, which is next to innate; yet she had not seen this defect in Schlagstein. He was a demigod by the side of the blue and silver legion, or the badly-dressed professors and students who polished the *trottoirs* of a German town. But he was tried by another standard here, and she was not even deceitful enough to cloak the truth from herself. But he was her husband, and to find him other than she had drawn him was a sad blow. But it was not altogether his fault. He was bad enough; but she had gone half-way to meet him in her self-deception; and now she would not believe in her own prejudices, so much as in his weakness, as her cause of failure.

Mrs. Penruddock was a Devonshire lady of

good repute; a pretty woman, without much force of character; and liking Myra as much as she was capable of liking anybody, beyond her family circle. She knew that Myra's father was a man of good family in her own county, and that had attracted her in the first instance; Myra's good looks and cheerfulness in the second. Besides this, she pitied her forlorn condition as the wife of what she called a City man. Penruddock spent his days at his club, and his nights in society with her; but as he was not obliged to get up and go out until he pleased, she could not help regarding him as a much more domestic person than a man who left home at nine a.m. to work till six p.m. So the good soul pitied Myra.

She had another reason for offering her consolations to Mrs. Ferrers. Myra had as yet no prospect of a family. There are certain women who cannot understand how young married people can exist in so abnormal a condition, and still less can they comprehend that they should be happy under the circumstances. Now, Aristotle is of a different opinion; for he thinks, with a show of justice, that the want or

loss of children is unimportant at present, for it may chance to be made up to you; but that the loss of a father or mother is much greater, as being irreparable. So there was balm in Gilead for Mrs. Ferrers; there was plenty of time for fruition, and in the meantime for hope.

The quiet unpretending brougham of this lady drew up at Myra's door, in a small but fashionable street off Grosvenor Place. The house was small, but everything about it was costly and good.

"What a charming house you have, Myra. Is this Mr. Ferrers' taste or yours?"

"I hardly know; I think he decided upon it. I know he chose the paper for the sake of the pictures."

After some more uninteresting conversation, Mrs. Penruddock came to the object of her visit.

"As you are going to dine with me to-day, I want you to come early. I have the Carringtons' box for to-night; and if you like it, we can go to hear Alboni. If not, I'll give it up, for some one is sure to be glad of it."

"Give it up! On no account. If you've no

one coming to dinner, I should like it immensely. Mr. Ferrers is gone to Richmond."

"So is Mr. Penruddock—to some extraordinary shareholders' meeting. I dare say they're both gone to the same *triste* affair. Penruddock calls it business, and says he hates it; but that you can't hold a hundred shares in anything, whether up or down, without confiding your joys or sorrows to a dish of white-bait. *Au revoir!*" and Mrs. Penruddock went out shopping.

The afternoon was very fine, and the Park was very full; and when Myra went into it in a barouche, which Ferrers had hired while Peters built him one, she could hardly get along. It was a remarkable fact that, though she was more admired by the men than almost anybody in town, even of those she knew most intimately, not one had ever endeavoured to occupy a place more prominent than that of an acquaintance. There were plenty of them who lounged a few minutes over the side of her carriage as opportunity offered, but no one who was persistently to be found as a companion to one of the most beautiful women in London.

Many men knew her slightly, and endeavoured to acquire a reputation of greater intimacy; men of good position in the world, who would willingly make the most of a dancing acquaintance with a woman whose footing was not assured in society, who was necessarily without the protection of her husband, who had not often the protection of a lady-friend with her. But their attentions fell dead before her extreme indifference or good-humoured simplicity.

"Ah, Mrs. Ferrers! Alone again?"

"Yes, Mr. Greenback—if anybody is alone in a crowd like this."

"Ha! ha!" smiled Cornet Greenback, who had been introduced at Ascot, and lost some gloves to Myra; "that's good—very good."

The cornet had not an idea of what he was talking about, but thought it right to say something.

"I like solitude of this sort; that's why I so often come alone."

"Yes, I see, of course. And my friend Ferrers?" inquired Greenback.

"Likes it for me, too; or I suppose he would come with me."

"What an unselfish and confiding creature!" says Greenback.

"Unselfish certainly, Mr. Greenback; but why confiding?"

"Oh, come, Mrs. Ferrers, confide! Doesn't he trust the most charming——"

"Now you're laughing at me, I know; so I shall go on. Good-bye. Watson, once round before you go home."

"I say, Rigby, do you know Mrs. Ferrers?" said Greenback, half an hour later.

"Yes. What of her? She's uncommonly pretty, I know that."

"I think she's not all there. D—me! if one says anything, you know, eh!"

"Perhaps she don't like you," says Rigby.

As she turned the corner of the gate by the French ambassador's house there was a momentary block, and a dark-coloured brougham with a single horse drove by. One person sat in the carriage, and leant back, almost purposely not to be seen. Myra caught sight of it; and at that moment Colonel Scarsbrook spoke to her.

"Oh, Colonel Scarsbrook! did you see that

brougham there, going towards Brompton? There, now it stops! Who was in it?"

"I did see it, but I don't know the occupant. At least, I imagine not."

He moved onward as though to look, but the brougham moved too.

"Ah! too late, Mrs. Ferrers, I'm afraid, to assist you or satisfy myself. I suppose it was a pretty woman."

"If it was the person I think, she is remarkably so. You don't know the carriage either?" said Myra to Scarsbrook.

"Not at all. A plain dark brougham is not remarkable, and I did not see the crest. You've excited my curiosity." And as she moved on he said, "*Au revoir*, this evening."

The Opera House was full when Myra and Mrs. Penruddock appeared in the Carringtons' box. They were later than usual, and attracted some attention on entering. It was a brilliant night; most of the great people yet in London were there, and diamonds sparkled, as well as bright eyes, from many parts of the house. But the peeresses had not a monopoly of these precious gifts of fortune. Rich women from the

Black Country exhibited coal in its costliest shape, with an unwitting satire upon themselves and the occupations and employments of their husbands. A Jew money-lender, and a bill-discounting attorney, who had returned that day from his rare banquet upon the hereditary remnants of a young marquis, had brought their wives with them to show what impudence and spoliation could do in the way of sapphires and rubies. Beauty and grace and elegance were not entirely confined either to the oligarchy that once shared the house itself among them, any more than were the glittering stones and lace which glinted from their shoulders and arms. There were fair City dames—wives of wealthy traders—speculators, country maidens, and many a middle-class belle, fit to do battle with the waning exclusiveness of high birth and hereditary beauty.

But among them all there was not one more lovely than Myra Ferrers. She was, as ever, exquisitely dressed; but not so over-dressed as to be half naked, nor so dazzling by the abundance of her ornaments as to have distracted attention from her natural charms. She had

not been long there when every *lorgnette* was turned towards her; and with that surreptitious admiration in some of her acquaintances, which acknowledges the presence of irresistible charms with a rare combination of defensive modesty. Mrs. Ferrers' admirers among the men of her own class, and her husband's friends, who were a step lower in the social ladder, all admitted her claims, but felt that she would be more flattered by their less public acknowledgment. Having satisfied themselves that she was there, and not looking the worse for a rather bad time of it that Gilbert Ferrers was said to have had at Newmarket, they directed their attention elsewhere. It was not long before they found out a new, if not an equal attraction.

The act was over, and two or three men were in Mrs. Penruddock's box, lounging in the back-ground. One leant over Myra's chair, and spoke a few words from time to time in what was meant to be a confidential tone. The subject-matter, however, did not strike Myra as inviting any necessity for reticence, for she said to Mrs. Penruddock—

"What do you think Sir George Chester is advancing? A new theory on musical entertainments in their perfection; he thinks the opera the most dangerous of our amusements." Here Sir George endeavoured to put in a word. Myra went on—"That because all our senses are appealed to in their highest excellence, music, poetry, painting, above all, our sense of woman's beauty——"

"Well, my dear, there was no great harm in that," said Mrs. Penruddock, laughing, while Sir George grew redder and redder as the explanation progressed.

"Stay a moment," said Myra, spitefully. "The conclusion he draws is, that he leaves it unfit for any virtue and fitted for any vice. There is but one remedy I've told him, much as we shall lose, dear: it is for him never to come any more." The fact being that Sir George had been dining more well than wisely, and he had been whispering some unmeaning nonsense to Myra, who only resented it in her usual way. At the same moment Myra looked round, and saw every glass fixed upon a box on the bend of the house, and by the evident curiosity which

lighted up the stalls, she was sure that something unusual was to be seen.

She followed the eyes of the crowd to the box in question, and raising her *lorgnette* too, saw something which astonished her sufficiently to call up a very excited look in her eyes and flush in her cheek. She was about to express her surprise in words, but remembered that it could be shared by nobody in the company. At that moment she felt how isolated her previous life had been from her present sympathies; or, rather, how very little real interest any one could feel in such a total stranger as she must appear to be. Her husband, after all, had a few feelings in common with her, but where was he to whom she might have appealed for confirmation of her senses?

Mathilde von Robeck sat in the box opposite, admirably dressed, and exciting no more admiration by her beauty than she really merited; and at the back of her chair stood her friend Colonel Scarsbrook, who had this morning professed a total ignorance of the remarkable stranger. "Perhaps he did not see her then," thought Myra, for she was loth to mistrust any

one; "but he has seen her now. I wish he'd come here."

"Sir George, if you should happen to see Colonel Scarsbrook, ask him to come to speak to me after the next act. Thanks. That's very good of you." And Sir George Chester went off as the curtain drew up, satisfied with the unspoken pardon which the commission implied.

From that time Myra's attention was distracted from the stage. To say that she did not hear those magnificent contralto tones when they called upon her in some splendid solo or recitative is not true; but the business of the stage and the thread of the plot had ceased to interest Mrs. Ferrers. She would turn round to eye that face which she knew so well, and which she would so willingly have seen nearer. "What could Mathilde be doing in London? Was it really Mathilde; and if so, why had she never written? Was not she herself to blame for some sort of neglect? Had she paid as much attention to the woman who had stood by her at the most imminent moment of her life as she had a right to expect?" She might have answered these questions in the affirmative or not:

it would not have altered the fact. There sat Mathilde, and Colonel Scarsbrook had certainly been talking to her. Perhaps he had been only just introduced.

But her doubts on this point were soon to be cleared up. At the end of the second act Colonel Scarsbrook came to pay his respects to Mrs. Penruddock and herself; and after a few minutes' conversation on ordinary subjects, she said—

"Please tell me, did I not see you in the box of that beautiful woman on the other side of the house? There, next to the Darcys."

"Certainly; and you're quite right; she is a beautiful woman. You're not afraid to admit it?" said Scarsbrook. He was a great admirer of Mrs. Ferrers.

"Why should I be? if at least I think so, as I do. Of course you recognised her."

"Recognise her! How do you mean, Mrs. Ferrers?"

"I mean that you have seen her before; have you not?"

"Yes—the day before yesterday."

"And did you not know her this morning in the dark-coloured brougham?"

"Not the least, as I told you. I did not see very plainly," added he, after a pause.

Myra, too, stopped a moment. Was Scarsbrook mystifying her? Why should he?

"Did you never see her in Ireland, in the late Lord Fitzcourthope's time? Surely you were with us when we went to visit the ruins on horseback and at a fishing party on the lake. She was there."

"Never, certainly, when I was at the Castle. Who do you imagine she is?"

"Imagine!" and Myra looked almost sceptically at his honest face. "Imagine! Why I know her. She was my governess or *gouvernante* for two years in Schlagstein,—Mathilde von Robeck; and a very clever woman she is."

"Then she has changed her name as well as yourself," said the colonel.

"To what? If you have been introduced to her, you know."

Now Scarsbrook did know, and though a man of the world, he knew no reason for concealing it.

"That's Mrs. Bransome. Bransome died abroad at least eight months ago. You see,

she's in black now. Nobody knew much of him, except that he had plenty of money and was a most eccentric person."

"You're mistaken or I am, Colonel Scarsbrook; and if my husband was here he would tell you so."

As it seemed impossible to come to a right understanding on the subject, Scarsbrook changed the conversation. He was about wishing Mrs. Ferrers and her companion good evening, when Mrs. Ferrers returned once more to the charge.

"Do you know when you saw Mrs.—Mrs. Bransome for the first time?"

"Undoubtedly; the day before yesterday in the Park. She was walking with a friend of mine, who introduced me to her. By the way, she cannot be the lady you mention, for she speaks English as well as I do."

"So did Mathilde von Robeck. You have talked to her for ten minutes at a time, most likely. Our language is almost like French in this respect—it is so idiomatic, so national in its abbreviations, that scarcely any foreigner can speak it for an hour without being detected.

Mathilde spoke so well, that I can quite believe in her remaining undetected for a quarter of that time."

"I see you're hard to convince, Mrs. Ferrers; so once more good-night."

Myra tried hard, on leaving the opera, to encounter Mrs. Bransome *née* Mathilde; but their carriage was announced early, and she was obliged to leave without clearing up her doubts.

When she reached home Ferrers had not returned, so she went to bed. Was it possible she could have been deceived? The same magnificent rolls of auburn hair, with its unruly waves and curls. The same beautiful complexion, the mouth so handsome but large, and the white teeth shining between coral lips; and the rather broad and massive chin. Never. But why not have written to her to receive her? They had had no quarrel, no coolness. Neither was a good correspondent; young ladyism was not the strong point of either. Myra, too, had reproached herself for accepting her services, and cooling afterwards in her friendship. She had no suspicions of Mathilde,

it is true. But she knew her character; and, as her position after marriage had given her a choice of selection, she had not been unwilling that too close an intimacy should die out. It is singular, too, that her husband seldom mentioned her name. Seldom! Never, unless when appealed to by his wife.

In a moment of time an idea, a sentiment, springs up, quite unaccountable from circumstances. It is a bare sentiment. Such a sentiment now took possession of Myra. And the next morning her husband sat opposite her at breakfast. He was not in a good humour, and his answers had been curt and not very polite. She had told him about the Opera.

"Do you know whom I saw last night at the Opera?"

"Thousands of fools, who chose to be parboiled. The thermometer at Richmond was at 100°."

"And among them an old friend of ours, Mathilde." To her surprise Gilbert Ferrers exhibited little astonishment, but much unbelief.

"Nonsense. You were dreaming. She's not in England."

"I should have thought not; surely she would have written to us."

"You haven't encouraged her to do so."

"True; who dreamt of her coming at the end of a season."

"Of course not. I tell you you're mistaken."

"So said Colonel Scarsbrook. He knows her, and calls her Mrs. Bransome, or some such name."

Scarsbrook had not said that Ferrers had been seen talking to Mrs. Bransome; he had thought it better not. Mrs. Bransome was handsome enough to be antagonistic to the peace of families.

For a minute Ferrers lost his presence of mind, and coloured slightly; but, recovering himself at once, he replied—

"Then most likely it was Mrs. Bransome." Saying which, he got up and rang as usual for a hansom.

Two things occurred to him as he walked down the steps of his house. The sooner Myra left town the better; and it would be as well

that Mrs. Bransome should show herself less for the next few days than she seemed disposed to do. As he stepped into the cab he wondered, "What the d—l could have taken his wife and Mrs. Penruddock to the Opera!"

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. TREBY AT HOME.

MRS. TREBY was a character such as is rarely met with in these degenerate days. She was a link between the true old Patrician Dame of the Jacobite times, and the modern Grande Dame of the Kettledrums, and *thés dansantes* of Belgravia. Mrs. Treby was a lady in every sense, well born, well dressed, well read, well bred, with, however, a sharp, hard way of saying exactly what she thought, though not to all people. Still she never said what she did not think to any body. A wholesome silence was one of her strongest weapons, contempt. When Mrs. Treby thought you not worth contradicting, you stood very low in her opinion.

She had a great idea of the claims of birth; but she never paraded them beyond her pride in the name of Gray. She was a Gray every inch of her, as she sometimes remarked after doing or saying something exceptionally truculent. This feeling is carried to a great extent with some persons, who claim immunity for all sorts of tricks, as squinting, scratching the head, dirty stockings, and biting the nails, on the score of family usage.

Her house and person were always *bien soignées*. She was beautifully dressed, by which I mean, not so much bedizened with fine, expensive, or even handsome clothes, as in a manner appropriate to her age and position: a widow lady of nearly seventy. Her servants had lived with her all their lives; they knew her wants and ways. Her cook was a model of punctuality, and her own man, Watson, of propriety. The younger maids were the best looking from among the Sunday school children, and always remained till they bettered (?) themselves by marriage, when the rector invariably found a substitute.

Mrs. Gray was well read in a certain way;

that is, in the literature of her own day. She was averse to modern romance; quoted the *Spectator*, "Clarissa Harlowe," Fielding, and Smollett, in their decent parts; knew the strong meats of Jeremy Taylor, Tillotson, and Beveridge; never read anything more fashionable than the *Times* newspaper; and accused Mr. Dickens, with some show of justice, of debasing the national style. She admitted that this was more in the imitators he had raised up than in himself; but she never forgave exaggeration, remembering she was "a Gray." She denounced the late Mr. Thackeray as full of affectation, with his "wherefores," "indeeds," "my lords," and "I, for my parts;" and believed in nothing but Dr. Johnson as a writer, and the late Mr. Pitt as a statesman.

She was tall, angular, handsome, with a lovely complexion, and "a nose." Such a woman must have had a bridge to her nose.

When Mrs. Treby called on Myra in London, she did so upon principle; she, too, was a Gray. She had made up her mind to see the first of her, and that it should be the last. Of her husband she took no note. He was out,

in the City, grinding corn (that is, poor victim) to make his bread: just where he ought to be. She nearly said this, but not quite. She had called to give her great-niece a sincere rap on the knuckles for her runaway match (and she did so), and to take her leave of her for ever (and she did not do so). Myra ensnared her by her kind and gentle ways; so the old lady hoped she should see her down at the Cottage, in Devonshire, and afterwards wrote it. It was not Myra's intention to accept this invitation, given, as it was, in marked indifference to Gilbert Ferrers; but his own wish had suggested the idea to her mind, and there could be no better opportunity than the present, of gratifying the old lady, and suiting her own purpose of retrenchment.

"You see, my dear Mrs. Ferrers, you'll allow me to call you by your Christian name, my dear——"

"Myra," rejoined she, as the lady of the house paused for a moment's consideration.

"Yes, Myra—I prefer it—it reminds me that you are one of us." This was perhaps the nearest approach to an untruth that Mrs. Treby

ever made. She meant it discarded all recollection of Mr. Ferrers.

"You are very kind, Mrs. Treby. I have not known much of my own family."

"You might have known more, my dear, but for your poor father's absurd request to that impoverished old lord, who must have brought you up in all sorts of needless luxuries. And now tell me, my dear, how did you manage the journey. Thank goodness we've no railroads here yet."

"They're sure to come. Mr. Ferrers wonders that you've no branch yet from the coast."

Mrs. Treby looked much offended at Mr. Ferrers' freedom in wondering at all about it.

"They'll not come in my day, ma'am; and I rather think my old friend Sir Paul Tressilyan is not a likely person to sell his land for any such purposes."

"It would have saved the trouble and expense of posting. I think there should be some mode of conveyance at all events."

"There's a coach, my dear Myra, which answers the purpose for young people well enough. I'm too old," and then, seeing that she

had no right to prescribe to her niece how she should travel, she added, smilingly, "and you're too young; so you did well to hire a carriage. And now, if you like, I'll show you the Cottage."

It was not a cottage, but it was the pride of Mrs. Treby to call it so. It was a sort of *maisonette.* It stood on the slope of a hill, backed by a grove of fine trees, and surrounded by beautiful shrubs. Outside of the garden was a park-like field, planted here and there with araucarias, deodaras, a cyprus, and four or five of the finest sorts of firs. These were railed off by rustic *chevaux de frieze*, for protection against a beautiful herd of Alderney cows, of which the old lady was exceedingly proud, and on which she made a point of expatiating to all her visitors. "You'll have such milk and cream, Myra, here, as you will get nowhere else in this county, or elsewhere."

The garden was laid out with the most exquisite finish, and at this time of year was a blaze of beautiful colour. From each end of the terrace, on which the flower-beds were planted, there shot into the rays of the morning sun jets

of water from handsome fountains, giving a contrasting coolness to the rich hues of scarlet and yellow which flashed along the borders.

Indoors everything betokened that hereditary comfort or luxury, which gives additional zest to wealth. The breakfast-room, the dining-room, the drawing-rooms, were full of good pictures, whose frames were not of yesterday, and whose colours were mellowed by time. The furniture was handsome and massive for the size of the rooms. The sofas were large and deep. The arm-chairs luxurious in their drapery and dimensions. The tables solid and of fine woods; and one especially, the pride of the mistress and her man, was of the darkest Spanish mahogany, in which it was as easy to see your face as in a looking-glass.

Three or four days later she was walking with her great-aunt in the garden.

"You call this the Cottage, Mrs. Treby. It's more than a cottage."

"It's better to err on the right side. They used to call it the Hall; now it wasn't that, you see. What would you have called it?"

"I think you might have hit upon something

between the two. At all events, it's not a cottage."

And Myra was quite interested in the discussion; already she began to appreciate her great-aunt.

"How like her father!" muttered Mrs. Treby to herself, looking at Myra. "Tell me, my dear, how do you like this place?"

"So much, that I shall ask you to close with your neighbour's offer for the cottage next week."

"But, my dear Myra," began Mrs. Treby, when she was cut short by—

"I shall endeavour to remain here as long as I am away from London. Mr. Ferrers proposes to come down from Friday to Monday, so that I should like to go in next week, if possible."

Myra knew what her aunt was going to say; and, not wishing to enter upon the merits of her husband, she put an end to Mrs. Treby's proposal before it was made.

This arrangement on Myra's part is easily explained. With all Mrs. Treby's kindness and wish to have her niece with her, Myra could not but feel that her first duty was to her husband;

and although she had accepted the old lady's hospitality for herself for a week, it was ostensibly to look for some place where she should be able to find a house for the autumn. The sea-coast presented itself to her, as it seems to do to everybody, as the most eligible situation. It had a railway, which facilitated her husband's journeys to and from London. It had shops, bathing-machines, a reading-room, and a circulating library. It had some pretentious looking houses, on which the morning and mid-day sun shone fiercely down, striking a dazzling brightness from the white shells and shingle, for which green blinds are but a miserable protection. Here Myra had made up her mind to make up her home, and had written to Gilbert Ferrers to that effect, telling him to come down at once. But Gilbert did not seem pleased with this display of affection on Myra's part. He pleaded business, the heat, and a dislike to the seaside; bidding her find a suitable house or cottage inland.

It was thus that her aunt had suggested a cottage, recommended by one of her own neighbours, within a moderate distance of Albany (that was

the name of Mrs. Treby's residence), which was comfortably furnished, and to which she could go at once, or at a moment's notice. To Myra it presented certain advantages in the protection and introduction afforded by Mrs. Treby, and by the knowledge that she was among the friends of her own father's family. Within a month of her having taken it, it was obvious that Ferrers intended to make but little use of their autumnal residence; and she was obliged to smother her feelings on the subject in a sharp encounter of wits with her aunt.

"My dear, although you know as your kinswoman I never approved of your runaway match with Mr. Ferrers, I hope you will bring him to see me next Saturday; come over in the afternoon, and stay to dinner. There's a good moon to go home by." This was meant to be gracious.

"Mr. Ferrers is not coming down, aunt." She had learnt now to call her so.

"Not coming down! When was he here before," said the old lady sharply.

"The Saturday before last."

"And when is he coming again?" continued she, pertinaciously.

"Oh, that's impossible to say," replied her niece, forcing a little laugh; "perhaps the Saturday after."

"But he's so uncertain."

"Oh, so men are, but not the City men; these Boards and Directors make money all the year round."

"I'm so glad to hear it, my dear. And is your house let?"

"No—no—I think not. Gilbert did say something about somebody going to look at it for the winter."

"Looking at it won't help to pay the rent. Myra, if I were you, I should propose to go back to it when November comes on. The leaf falls here; and though the place is warm, and well fitted for delicate chests, it's not the place to improve a healthy constitution like yours. It's sadly too relaxing."

"I'm anxious to be away from town, if I can, aunt. Perhaps if I was nearer, Gilbert might be better able to get down occasionally. But he hates Brighton, and those places."

"Then go to your own house, Myra. It's not desirable, my dear, that a young and attractive

woman should be away so long, or so far; and he ought not to wish it."

"Oh! aunt."

"It's no use to say 'Oh! aunt.' You've horses and carriages, and luxuries of every kind; a good house to go to, a lucrative business of your husband's, and an independence of your own. What's the use of all this if you're not to be happy."

"I am happy. But business, Gilbert says, is not what it was. He's had some reverses; and, therefore, while I am away, living quietly here, and he is at his club——"

"Twice as expensive, as if you were together. Here's your board and rent, and your ponies——"

"I've sold them." Her aunt stared with astonishment. "Yes, aunt, I was sorry to part with them, and I think Gilbert will be angry; but Colonel Forbes wanted them for his wife, and offered me fifteen pounds more than Gilbert gave for them. So I sent him the money to pay bills with."

"And how did you come here?"

"I came in—in—a fly. Mr. Gibson, the land-

lord, managed it for me, and offered to drive me over whenever I want to come here; but I preferred the fly."

Upon which the generally undemonstrative old lady fell upon her niece and kissed her.

"She's a Gray all over! The next time you come, come to stay for a few days; and, Myra dear, if Mr. Ferrers should come down, ask him to come and stay here. Whenever your month's up, give up the house and come to me."

Thus Myra made a friend of her grand-aunt; but she did not succeed in bringing down Gilbert Ferrers.

That gentleman was engaged in town. What he had said was, for him, very true. Business was bad; not slack, but bad. It had been going the wrong way. He had been gambling, and got the worst of it. You may do that as an outsider on the *Bourse;* and Gilbert Ferrers began to have too many irons in the fire. To be sure he was able to get on as well as most people when things were not good, for he was splendidly unprincipled; and he seemed to enjoy an immunity from suspicion. How could a man with such a lovely wife and such ex-

cellent Lafitte be a rascal? And he was such a good fellow; so handsome; not refined, but cheerful; always ready to play whist, pool, *ecarté*, what you will; frequently losing small stakes which were not noticed, and winning large ones which were.

A bill he never paid as long as he could avoid doing so; and, therefore, he was always well provided with pocket-money. He had a good balance at his bankers and loose money in his pocket; a charming constitution and no sort of conscience. He could not let his house; in fact, he had not the slightest intention of doing so. He gave admirable little dinners there to his bachelor friends, and took them down to Stevens', or to Verry's, when he made it a ladies' party, which he sometimes did. It was to console him, as he said, for Mrs. Ferrers' continued absence.

But he set to work to right matters in the City. There a few of his ventures were decidedly shaky, and there was no chance of getting anything out of them at present. The thing to do was to hold on. In the spring of the year there would be another fillip. He

thought himself clever at racing. He was a child in the hands into which he fell. He could not even hold his own. He was unscrupulous enough for anything. He would have pulled every horse he had in his stable every day of the week. He would have suborned every jockey, every trainer, if he could have got at them. He would have poisoned every horse and bought up every handicapper that was in the market. But he could not win. He could not get the horses, or he could not get the money, or he could not get the men. He would not give it up, as he never intended to pay his trainer, unless it suited him to do so; but when he lost his money and his time, his astonishment far outweighed his grief. "They must be a d——d pack of scoundrels indeed to have got the better of me." Like the man who stole his brooms in detail, he thought it odd that anybody should be able to undersell him.

Towards the end of November Myra returned to London. The house was not let, so she insisted upon taking her aunt's advice. It was much to the disgust of her husband, who

showed temper upon the occasion. However, there was no answer to Myra's arguments, though many to her determination. She had made Mrs. Treby the depositary of some of her troubles, especially her pecuniary ones; and, of course, that lady, as a Gray, had but one line of counsel to give. If your husband will be dishonest there is the greater reason for your checking him. So Myra prepared for her winter campaign in London. Gilbert Ferrers would now willingly have compounded for Brighton, or St. Leonard's; but it was too late for compromise, and Mrs. Ferrers remained at home, shut up. Shut up comparatively speaking. Some of her husband's City friends were in town and came to see her. There was an occasional dinner, at which shares, stocks, scrip, and other matters of a like kind played a prominent part in the conversation; but she was glad to know that there were to be no balls, concerts, picnics, or extravagant little dinners, to which she would be compelled to go.

During the winter and early spring Gilbert Ferrers continued to live much as usual; and he raised money successfully for his private ex-

travagances; more, indeed, than, and for purposes of which, Myra never, never dreamt.

His great ally upon these occasions, besides the legitimate gamblers in such stakes, was Mr. Percy Hardman. He was a vulgar rascal, as I have said before, and made himself useful in much dirty work. But he knew his utility, and recouped himself by a closer intimacy with Ferrers. He still looked and smelt of his black pipe and gin and water; and though he had no taste, he began to have an inclination for higher life.

"Things look a little down again, Hardman," said the more aristocratic robber of the two; "those Continental Communication shares won't do."

"No, not to hold. Do you know they've been tunnelling on the other side, and it hasn't gone right? They've come to grief by the water oozing through the stratum, as they call it. But it is not meant to ooze out yet. Some score of workmen have been drowned; but they'll come out well in a month or two. Meantime——"

"Yes; my dear fellow, meantime. It's very well for you to live upon five and threepence a

week, or forge small cheques on your governor; but what the d—l am I to do?" and Ferrers spread his hands as if they were as clean as they were empty. "What's to be done? I must have a couple of thousand."

"Try Blunt," said the other coolly.

"You might as well say, 'Try Warren or Hunt.' The one's not more dead than old Blunt to persuasion."

"Where's your wife's money? that's not all gone."

"One can't live upon nothing; at least I can't; and you know how much has been paid up and invested."

"And is paying you a capital interest in income. However, I'll tell you what I'll do." Here he appeared to consider. "I'll come and dine with you, and—and Mrs. Ferrers, and we'll talk the matter over."

It was not the first time he had hinted at such a contingency; but he had never proposed doing so point-blank before. However, Gilbert Ferrers could only acquiesce; and on the strength of it Percy Hardman assisted him to raise some money.

Mrs. Ferrers stood with her lighted candle ready to retire, having already rung for her maid.

"Who in the name of fortune is that extraordinary individual who has just taken himself off? I think you called him Hardman; who or what is he?"

"A friend of mine," said Gilbert, standing with his back to the fire. "He makes himself useful to me, Mrs. Ferrers, and I should like him to be treated with some civility."

"Then you'd better ask somebody here to do it, or to help at all events. Is he one of your electioneering agents?"

"I'd better encourage that idea," thought Ferrers, so without any hesitation he said, "Yes, he is; and he holds a good deal of the Longpurse borough in his hands."

"Longpurse must be very dirty, then."

"Possibly; but as it was one of your early ambitions to see me with a seat in the House, you must put up with the tools necessary for working it."

Here Ferrers began to whistle, and Mrs. Ferrers put down her candle.

"That ambition is over for more reasons than one; and the last has clenched it." And Myra spoke with more warmth than usual.

"Then I suppose you've another. Women generally have two or more at command."

"I have another; a better one, Gilbert. It is to see you paying your way."

He was unmoved by what she hoped would have been an appeal to his better feelings.

"I thought it might be a new barouche with C springs, as I hear you never use your carriage. Is there any reason for this, madam?"

"Yes; that it's not paid for; and I never intend to use it again till it is."

"More fool you! You might as well decline to eat your dinner."

"That's a necessity, and sometimes a painful one; but I've provided for it to a certain extent;" and tears of indignation filled her eyes.

"Really? It would be amusing to know how."

"Then I'll entertain you. By selling the most expensive of my jewellery and by curtailing my

wardrobe. I've also given my maid notice, and I'll try to do without so expensive a luxury as personal attendance."

"D——n! madam, do you wish to make me the laughing-stock of the whole world? I suppose you'll sell the horses next, unless you condescend to ask me where you're likely to get the best price for them."

"I should if they were my own; but as they are not, I can go no further than to refuse to make use of them any more."

Ferrers rang the bell violently.

"The brougham to-morrow morning, and till further orders, to take me to the City at half-past ten."

"Yes, sir," said the man.

And as Mrs. Ferrers turned to go, her husband added—

"It's not much use my ordering a hansom, with the best pair of horses in London eating their heads off."

As he uttered the last words, the door closed very quietly, but decisively, and Myra went up to her room.

Because the reader has not been made ac-

quainted with these sort of scenes, it must not be imagined that this was by any means the first of them. A great many, more or less violent on his part, and more or less calm on her part, had taken place; and, like everything else, they now ceased to affect either as formerly. Married couples will tell you that, like great vices, they begin by the thin end of the wedge. A word of contradiction at the wrong time, when the digestion is not as it should be; an argument about nothing, mounting up to a petty personality; an oath on one side, a tear on the other; a day's silence or a day's absence, and then a reconciliation; a general calm after storm, leaving the sea lumpy and permanently disagreeable; and then the last plunge but one, the worst of all—mutual distrust, suspicion, studied politeness on the one side, monosyllabic sulkiness on the other; no more passion, rudeness, recrimination, but in a short time total indifference. One year after marriage they were getting on for this.

After this scene Gilbert Ferrers absented himself from home more frequently than ever, and Myra threw herself into a fancied and fashion-

able carelessness on the subject, which ended as might have been expected.

But she sternly refused to get in debt, and she kept her word.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BITTER FRUIT OF SELF-WILL.

AS to goddesses, commend me to Fashion. She is as continent as the Black-hole in Calcutta, or three single gentlemen rolled into one. She contains at times everything. She is Venus, Juno, Minerva. She takes to Turkish baths, Amontillado sherry, horse-flesh, salt and brandy, or chloroform; rides on a balloon, a horse, a broomstick, or a velocipede; drives a stableman's break, a spider phaeton, or an American sulky; reads a Roman Catholic Ritual, Hobbes' "Leviathan" in blackletter, Rabelais, or the *Family Herald*, as the case may be; goes in for photography, potichomanie, cuneiform inscriptions, the North Pole, the dramatic unities, and the Siamese twins, with equal

energy, and commits so many and such healthful vagaries, that no wonder she rules the world.

Fashion at this time—some four years back, that is—went in for charity, and it suited many constitutions, but not purses. However, as real charity is not measured by the length or breadth of the purse, but by the inclination (a virtue in which, truly, Aristotle is right when he says that it may be tested by the gratification it affords), it suited as many poor persons as rich, and Myra found her solace among the number. Some liked to be dressed with hair shirts, sandals, Carmelite cords (these are no relations to kerseymere breeches), hoods, crosses, and parched peas. Myra preferred silks and soap.

It being the fashion with others, and to a certain extent with her, she was frequently thrown into the society of her friends, who would bemoan her loss of carriage, and insist upon her taking the vacant seat in their own. It was no use to say that she preferred walking, and it was all she could say; they would condemn that selfish Mr. Ferrers, who always had the carriage to go into the City, and who took his turn afterwards in the streets (for he never

went into the Row), and never left it at home for his wife. It was a sort of compromise, to be sure, between the true and the false; but Myra felt it was better than blurting out the fact; so she let it pass, and took vacant seats in friendly barouches and broughams. To relieve, as far as she could, the sick and needy, to give clothes to the naked and consolation to the ignorant, became an intrinsic part of Mrs. Ferrers' livelihood, therefore; and though Gilbert sneered at her, and wondered where the money came from for her magnificent donations of one pound one and two pounds two, he did not laugh her out of her occupation.

Nothing had annoyed him so much as his wife's determinations of economy. That she would not appear in the world as she had done, and give a certain influence to his position by her good looks and cheerful spirits was bad enough; but that she should refuse to use a carriage, which even the sporting scribblers had condescended to notice as one of the best in the Row; that she should no longer exhibit herself in the Ladies' Mile between twelve and two, and that she should borrow all her glory from

others, who despised her husband, and whom he actually disliked, was too provoking. While his material interests suffered, his pride was hurt, and the scandalmongers and wags amused themselves at his expense. Myra did not know this, or her sense of justice would have come to a compromise; but Ferrers knew it, and resented it upon his wife, by renewed indifference and prolonged absences from home.

"I shall not be home to-day to dinner," he was occasionally polite enough to say; but even that depended entirely upon his temper; and Myra accepted the announcement usually without remark. At all events she never inquired why.

"I am going out of town to-night, and shall not be back till Monday," said Ferrers one Friday afternoon in June. It was the week between Epsom and Ascot, at the former of which her husband had won a considerable stake (though he had not condescended to tell her so), and London was as full as it well could be.

"Are you going far from town?" inquired Myra.

"No, not far; but partly upon business. I

have a house for Ascot next week, which I got by accident; and I should wish you to go, if you have no objection."

"I have an objection—rather a serious one. I have no dresses fit for it."

"Is that your only objection really to being seen with your husband?"

"The only one that you would think serious, Gilbert;" and she spoke with more kindness than she had shown in their intercourse of late. "I have never refused your society when I could have it; but if my own personal likings were concerned, I would rather not go to Ascot at all. If you go, I should prefer to go with you."

"And why would you rather not go at all?"

"Because I am sure it must be an expensive week, and I have heard you complain seriously of want of money. But if you wish to go to Ascot under the circumstances, I repeat I will go with you."

"Then why do you still refuse the use of your carriage?"

"That is a different case. The carriage, though not mine, is purchased for my service, and expenses connected with it are somehow

personal extravagances. If I am willing to walk, Gilbert, surely the thing can scarcely be worth quarrelling about."

Her good humour deserved a better return than it got—

"Ridiculous Quixotism! It can be only done to put me in an invidious position."

Myra considered a moment, and then said—

"You attribute a wrong motive to my conduct. Perhaps, as you say, the principle may be the same, and if so, I ought to refuse to participate in any pleasures, which I believe other people pay for. However, I don't wish to split straws with you, Gilbert, nor to furnish food for others' conjectures. Accident, as much as anything, revealed to me some of your difficulties, and if I go with you to Ascot it is not because I feel less acutely the necessity for limiting my personal expenses as much as ever."

Ferrers laughed aloud.

"You've a pleasant way of acceding to one's request, at all events. However, on Monday I shall be in town again, and you will not object to going down in my carriage to my house at Sunning Hill to eat my luncheon, and to wear

the dresses that I will send you and pay for." With which he left the room.

Gilbert Ferrers had not responded with much kindness to the little advances which Myra, more by manner than words, had made. She did not look for reconciliation, if by it was meant an interchange of ideas and mind, that harmonious intercourse which exists between honest and loving hearts. In eighteen months that was gone: for its basis was respect and honour, and Myra had seen them disperse like a mist before a vivid reality. But Myra had not lost all love for her husband. She could not forget how much she had loved him, and that all she had loved in him was not truth. She of all persons should not be too hard upon him, for had not she been the sum and object of one treacherous action? Had she been more truthful than he? Was it not her own attractions which had set him on, and which taught him in his converse with her to make the worse appear the better cause? Myra was like other women: and a kind word now would have made all right, she thought, and have brought her to his feet.

But that kind word never came. He seemed

to rejoice in repelling her. He had some reason why she should dislike him, or why she should feel that she was of a nature uncongenial to his. He made her feel this when he spoke to her. And he had a reason, a very all-sufficient one, of which Myra at present was profoundly ignorant. And on this account, when his back was turned, she sat silently by herself and thought of him, as she had seen him eighteen months ago, as if he were not dishonest, nor unkind, inconsiderate as regarded her and his fellow-creatures, indifferent to his or her character and reputation. Once or twice, as the tears ran over her taper fingers, which she had denuded of some of the most valuable ornaments, she was shaken in her faith, and wondered whether it were not better to sink and swim together. Debt! what was it? Well, accidentally, for a poor man with Heaven-sent incumbrances whom he was bound to clothe and feed, venial; for the Curate of St. Magnus, whose lodgings cost a third of his income, and were then scarcely habitable, venial; for the ignorant, who had been entangled, and was unable to withdraw his foot before the wild

beasts of temptation or the law were upon him, excusable: but for Gilbert Ferrers, who knew his position, and who refused to refrain from robbing his butchers, bakers, clothiers, upholsterers, carriage builders, and everybody else who would trust him, it was much worse; but ought his own wife to be his first accuser? So she answered herself, and she said that she would try, on his return, to draw him closer to herself again, and to make him honest in spite of himself for love of her. Surely she was not yet a beggar! All her money was at his service. She had, indeed, given it all freely by his advice under his direction. Now she would advise the investment of every shilling in the payment of debts. She hoped Deloraine need not know.

Good honest soul! how little she knew of business, or she might have foreseen that that power of attorney had wrought wonders: and that every security had been worked to raise money for her worthless husband's schemes.

One thing about her marriage had always annoyed her. She was well aware of the steps by which she had been led on by Mathilde to talk and think about this unknown Gilbert

Ferrers. She blamed no one but herself now for her childish imagination. She knew she had made a god of a very unworthy material, and she gave herself full credit for her folly. But why did Gilbert pretend to so much that he was not? I made him a hero, but not a wealthy one. I made him an idol, but I did not set him up on the pinnacle which he pretended to occupy. I made him my prince, but he gave himself high birth, fashion, influence, universal dominion, hereditary or acquired, in the eyes of the whole world. Did not he know it would disappoint me? He had better have taught me not to expect it in this world than to have deceived me. He might have foreseen it would be to his own cost. But Myra prescribed for herself resignation and forgiveness of injury; but she did not take a drive in the carriage.

While Mrs. Ferrers was making good resolutions, Mr. Ferrers was making his way down to the London Bridge Terminus (there was none as yet at the West-end), on his way to the seaside. For a person with such a horror of salt water, he showed sufficient energy in taking the

requisite steps for going there. Not that he took ticket for Brighton, or Dover, or St. Leonard's, but to Reigate, which, as the reader knows, if at least he or she have been coached for an army examination, is not on the coast.

When he reached Reigate, he got out, and with a small portmanteau, stepped at once into a brougham which met him. A lady sat back in the brougham with a rather thick veil down, which she did not remove till the carriage had run out of the Reigate Junction. Her greeting was then warm enough to make up for the apparent coldness of the meeting; and as she raised her veil, for the purpose of making the greeting as impressive as such usually are, she disclosed the features which we have known as Mademoiselle Robeck's, and which Myra had recognised in the Opera on the last night of the previous season. The lady was Mathilde von Robeck, now enjoying a dignified alias as Mrs. Bransome.

How came she to be Mrs. Bransome? What had become of Bransome? Where had he lived? When had he married? And for what earthly purpose had he married Mrs. Montressor's

assistant and bugbear? For that lady's peace of mind had been much restored when Mathilde took herself off some time after Myra Gray's disappearance.

The fact is, Bransome was a myth. There had been some such person in Germany some years back. The name was not entirely unknown in Schlagstein. And therefore when it became desirable that Mathilde should have a travelling name, and she could not be a captain, she became Mrs. Bransome. The crossing of the frontier had an extraordinary effect upon her: it made a widow of her at once; and so intolerably was she beset, even in the mourning she had assumed, by love-making and proposals, that she almost thought of recalling Mr. Bransome to life until she reached England. Mathilde von Robeck would not remain quiet many months after Gilbert Ferrers had married Myra; and by the end of the following summer she had installed herself in a cottage in England, where she appeared as the retiring widow of the late lamented Mr. Bransome, and the *protegée* of her early friend and trustee, Mr. Gilbert Ferrers.

Gilbert Ferrers would have had the sole virtue of constancy to this woman, whom he certainly loved, not as she loved him, but in his own selfish way, but for the difficulties which after a time began to surround him. And the love he really felt for her was the secret of his unfeeling indifference to the occasional gleams of returning affection in his wife. He was bad enough to have thrown her off at once and altogether; but he was not bold enough nor rich enough. Either would have done; but he had not yet prospered sufficiently to proclaim to the world how very vicious he could be. His own belief in the power of wealth was unbounded. He had the lowest opinion of motives: and thus it was that he so desperately struggled for the shadow of what he believed to be τό κάλον when he found the reality slipping through his fingers. For when the scientific or speculative world had bored seven hundred feet in the chalk and below it, in order to tunnel from Dover to Calais, and when all his prospects were about to be realised, and those thousands he had invested were bound to be doubled, the water did find its way through the crevices, drowned the workmen, and sent

the shares down to a most remarkable discount. And when this state of things came about, he found the late Mr. Bransome's widow almost as troublesome as Mrs. Gilbert Ferrers, and twenty times as extravagant.

There was a deliberate want of feeling about this fellow that made him as bad as any of the young men about town who unite themselves to a mass of wrinkles, ugliness, or vulgarity for the sake of its money; and a still greater laxity of morality, excepting in the case of those who, like Ferrers, have already provided themselves with a mistress beforehand.

And what shall be said for the woman. She had given herself up to the bitterness of her own passions with a ruthlessness that broke down all barriers, not only of modesty, but of decency. She had been instrumental in persuading her own pupil to marry her lover clandestinely, in order that he and she might live upon the plunder.

And they were living upon it, and had lived upon it, for eighteen months past; and now, when it ought to have been accumulating, like grain gathered into barns, when it ought to

have proclaimed to the souls that had stored it, "Take your fill: eat, drink, be merry," it crumbled away, and left not a vestige of itself or its results behind. Excepting in impudence, and a very spurious system of credit, which was about to fail him, Gilbert Ferrers was some thousands worse than a beggar.

But he went to Ascot, where he successfully suborned a stable-boy, and saw a favourite beat after he had laid one thousand to three hundred against him twice over.

But I am anticipating. While Gilbert Ferrers, with Mrs. Bransome, pursued his way to a beautiful little nest lying near the sea by St. Leonard's, where there could be no interruption to a widow so desirous of retirement from the world; where the hills on the north and east shelter the little cottage without from the intrusion of the winds, and where the sea rolls its golden waters towards the brightly-clad garden, in its gaudy simplicity of neatness and colour, Myra was restlessly passing her time in the study of her good resolutions, and the part she would play.

"There is one thing still," said she to herself,

"and we may yet be happier than we have been. Gilbert has left me no hole for suspicions of a grave kind. He does not love me as he said he did, nor indeed has he ever done so; but he loves no one else. How happy am I, at least compared with poor Anne, and Lady Beatrice, or Catherine, or twenty more, that have their suspicions, ah! too justly, if half the world says is true." With which light-hearted and illogical sentiment Myra ran up-stairs to her dressing-room to dress for a small evening party, a very mild at home, at Mrs. Penruddock's, who was in town on her way from some place to another place with which we have nothing to do.

As it was after nine o'clock, the first thing that Myra did was to ring for her maid. She had dispensed with her expensive Abigail, and was attended by what poets call a "neat-handed Phyllis," which means a sort of maid of all work and mistress of none. The consequence was that Mrs. Ferrers had generally a good deal to do for herself. At the present time, when the girl appeared with a light, she opened a drawer, and instead of a box of wax

matches, which, by the way, were not yet invented, she fell foul of some paper spills, old letters, and envelopes, torn up and folded with more or less neatness. Mrs. Ferrers was not at that moment disposed to be critical, and took up the nearest with the intention of lighting her own toilette-table candles. On approaching the light, she was suddenly struck with the peculiarity of the writing, and, as she unfolded it for further inspection, her heart began to beat faster than usual. It proved to be part of an envelope, on thin paper, addressed to her husband. The writing was small, and very neat and clerk-like, quite unmistakable by Myra, who had seen the writing too often to doubt. The hand was unquestionably that of Mathilde von Robeck.

Mrs. Ferrers sat down for a moment, and using another spill of a character that she also knew, pressed her hand upon her heart, and then turned to the servant.

"Did you fold these spills, Chambers?" said she, with fair command of her voice.

"Yes, ma'am; while you were out one day, I collected the papers from your room and

master's, and made all these." It looked like a triumph of industry.

"Do you recollect this thin paper?" It was also slightly tinted.

"Yes, ma'am, I remember it. There was only one bit; an envelope in master's dressing-room. It had nothing in it," added she, somewhat sharply.

"Thanks. Go into the next room; I'll ring when I want you."

Mrs. Ferrers then examined the writing carefully by the light. She need not have done so, for there was no question about its German character. In fact, it was written much as a neat German caligraphist would have written English.

The part of the envelope saved was—

——bert Ferrers, Esq.,
Chester Street, Grosvenor Place,
London, l'Angleterre.

A part of the post-mark, too, remained, and on it was the latter half of the word Schlagstein. When had Gilbert Ferrers received this? It

looked worn; but that might have been from carrying about with other letters. At that moment she saw a date, somewhat defaced, but sufficiently legible. She advanced it again to the light, and then saw the words, Juillet 14, 1847 —not long before the night when Myra had seen Mathilde at the Opera. Mrs. Ferrers' face lost its colour. She sat for five minutes, thinking of her life with Mathilde, of her character, of her husband during their courtship, of his sojourn at Schlagstein. She was the least suspicious of women. As open as the day herself, she would not believe so great an ill of him. But why has he lied to me again, and on such a subject? He knew she was in town. Why did she write to him? and why did she not come here? She sat for five minutes more, and they were almost the hardest five minutes she had yet passed. Then she looked once more at the writing, and folded it up neatly, placing it among some papers in a small jewel case, and turning her golden key upon it.

"This is too much! There must be some reason for this great deceit."

Then she rang again for her maid, and at ten o'clock she went to Mrs. Penruddock's.

"My dear Myra, you look pale to-night; and you're not in your usual spirits." Notwithstanding, Mrs. Ferrers stayed late, and seemed then in no hurry to be left alone. "I'll call for you to-morrow at five o'clock, if Mr. Ferrers is away."

"Thanks. I shall be alone." And she went home.

CHAPTER IX.

ASCOT. MIRABEAU EFFECTS A REVOLUTION.

MYRA FERRERS was, as times go, an amiable woman, impulsive, erring, not an angel in any sense of the word; scarcely dull enough for a terrestrial spirit, not good enough for an ethereal. Still she was an amiable woman, lovable in all its moods and tenses; and it was only unfortunate that her husband had not seen her with the same eyes as others. There is no such reformatory as a home, with a loving and loved woman for your supervisor. If policemen wore petticoats,—in other words, if they were policewomen, and disposed to make themselves agreeable, Lord Kimberley might have saved himself a great deal of trouble over the "suspected" clauses of

his Criminal Bill. There would be fewer criminal Bills if the Bills were well mated.

But Gilbert Ferrers did not care for his wife; never had cared for her as a wife, not even as a woman, only as so much scrip. And this woman had to undergo a terrible punishment only because she did not know that. Ignorance is hardly dealt with in this world; and we learn the lesson from our earliest days of schooling. Voluntary ignorance is bad, to be sure. When men suffer because they will not learn, they suffer justly. But Myra Gray had no chance of learning till she became Myra Ferrers, and then it was too late. Well, to be candid, she did not suffer for her ignorance; she suffered for her utter disregard for conventionalities. If she had thought, that is, reflected; if she had waited for advice, or gone to old Comtesse de Horsemann herself, that lady would have told her she was doing wrong, and would have put her under the surveillance of the police or the gendarmerie; and a very proper measure too. If she had waited she would have seen a better friend than all of them, Henry Deloraine, who

would have given her such reasons for drawing her foot from the mire, that she would have done so, even though, like Cinderella, she had left her slipper behind.

It had taken just eighteen months to do for her what half the number of days does for a puppy. It had taken that time to open her eyes. She knew how wrong she had been before, but she did not know the extent of her stupidity. She had blundered along in the dark hitherto, now she saw how very thick that darkness was.

Whom should she consult? consideration the first. Nobody. For the best of all possible reasons, she had no one whom she could consult. The great City Ladies, as Tom Tug, the jolly young waterman, called them, who had made friends with her for the sake of her husband (the Japanese Bank manager, Pas de Calais, Underground Railway director, and general dispenser of all good things and straight tips in the salt, coal, iron, copper, petroleum, and universal mining companies), were of two kinds, neither of them available if Myra had felt disposed to ask or to follow their advice. They would either have held up their hands in

speechless amazement at the depravity of a man who could receive a letter without the consent or knowledge of his wife; or they would have regarded the whole affair as a mere matter of ordinary life at the West-end, and so far congratulatory as establishing Myra's claims to be considered a woman of fashion. The ladies who had taken her by the hand and driven her about, who accompanied her to the lying-in hospitals and out-lying dispensaries, where they compromised during the day for a great deal of liveliness during the night, would scarcely have listened patiently to her recital of woes. "My dear, it's the way of the world; there's nothing in it: a platonic affection for your old governess, who helped you to run away with him. Nothing more natural! He owes her so much he could hardly do less, though he might have had the honesty to tell you of it." That's about the extent of Belgravian condolences which could have been expected from women who were up to their eyes in Ritualism and high living.

By the morning of Monday, on which day Gilbert Ferrers was expected home to go to

Ascot, Myra had determined upon the only dignified plan of action. She had just sat down to luncheon, when the brougham which had been sent to the railway station arrived. Ferrers alighted quickly, and it is not too much to remark upon the exterior of Myra's husband, that it did her taste credit. He looked well, fresh, cheerful, and prosperous. No one to have looked at him could have possibly conceived that he was some thousands worse than a beggar, or to have heard the confident assurance with which he gave his orders to his coachman for his afternoon arrangements, that he knew it. Novelists and poets will be physiognomists. They can always detect the lurking villain; there's a something about the smile of your defaulter, which exposes them to the knowing ones at once. Your tragedy villain of modern life who bets, and swears, and robs men of their money, and women of their virtue, is always "grim" and "sardonic;" or ought to be, for he's to be adapted to the stage afterwards.

This was not at all the case with Gilbert Ferrers. There was nothing "grim" or "sar-

donic" about the smile with which he met his wife's greeting. As he stood before her, he was, as we have elsewhere said (or meant to have said), something less than a gentleman at the West-end of town. He was a little too well done. Like a horse whose mane and tail and fetlocks have been pulled to such a nicety as to attract attention from a weak point or two, Gilbert Ferrers doated on his person, not only for his extraordinary good looks, but for his coat, necktie, gloves, boots, and hat. There are, and always have been, some very band-box looking men among the "proceres" of the present day; but they do not quite depend upon their boot-maker and tailor, nor even on the shape of their nose, for that unmistakable air of breeding which some of them have.

Now Ferrers had plenty of fashion, but not so much breeding. He was eminently short of quality, as he took his seat at luncheon, and remodelled the bouquet in his button-hole.

"I'm afraid you'll find that half cold. I did not know the carriage was gone for you, or I could have waited."

"That's of no consequence. What time shall you be ready to start?"

Myra did not answer the question but by another.

"Is it impertinent to ask where you have been, and how you have enjoyed yourself?"

"Not at all. I have been a short distance out of town, and enjoyed it very much. Could one help it in such weather?"

"On business or pleasure?" said Myra, briefly.

"Both. It's seldom one combines the two. I was fortunate."

Myra looked at her husband openly but closely, and wondered how far he was lying now. She had no doubt about the fact; but he continued to eat under her cross-examination.

"Gilbert," said she after a pause of about a minute, "how long is it since you saw Mathilde von Robeck?"

The question so startled her husband under the peculiar circumstances of the case, that he condescended to blush. He was not often guilty of this juvenile failing, but he did so now.

"How long is it since I have seen Mathilde

von Robeck," said he, repeating her question slowly, and then laughing. He did this to gain time, and, though he instinctively saw that Myra was looking him through and through, he replied to her question, "Surely you know as well as I do."

It has been said of Robert Houdin that he had a singular capacity of making two calculations at the same time; that is to say, that while he was engaged apparently in an elaborate feat of legerdemain, he was taking note of everything that was going on around him, and was perfectly capable of reading a book or a letter.

Something of the same kind belonged to Gilbert Ferrers. For, though he was no conjuror, he had so long been engaged in deceiving his neighbours, as to have rendered this sort of double vision essential to him. He made use of the faculty now to the following extent. He began by thinking that his wife's question had necessarily something to do with his late visit, and was preparing to defend himself accordingly, when he recollected in a moment that the intelligence must have reference to a previous

time. Their parting on Friday had been amicable, and it was morally impossible that she should again have caught sight of Mathilde, as he had himself spent the intervening time in her company. He therefore answered as he had done, "Surely you know as well as I do."

"Do you mean, then, that you have not seen her since our marriage?"

"You said something about having seen her in town last year. Of course now you know you were mistaken."

Myra was pale with a repressed excitement. She longed to tell him the truth, the foundation of her suspicions, but thought it wiser not to do so. If the letter had been one on private business, at least he need not deny it.

"I do not know that I was mistaken. I have every reason to think I was not."

Here Gilbert Ferrers laughed again uneasily, while he replied—

"It is not necessary, as I did not see her on that memorable evening, that I should share your belief."

"You told me, or gave me to understand at that time, that you had never heard from her;

and I believed you. Have you ever heard from her?"

"Was it probable? Would she have come to England without letting us know; and was she more likely to write to me than to you?"

"Then she never did write to you?"

Now Ferrers knew that no living soul had ever seen her letters but himself; that they had been burnt as soon as read; and that as Mathilde von Robeck, she was utterly unknown in this country. So he rejoined—

"Some fool has been putting ridiculous notions into your head, I suppose—has told you that I have been seen with the wife or daughter of some friend or acquaintance; and you have conjured up this precious bugbear, Mathilde von Robeck, to excuse your ill temper and perversity."

"No one has put it into my head. You have denied the fact: let it be sufficient. It can be but of little consequence to you if I have been mistaken." She stood erect by the side of the table, looking at him through her honest eyes, which were dimmed with gathering tears, but commanding her voice, which was but slightly tremulous.

"You have been mistaken. I suppose Mrs. Penruddock has been schooling you, and wants to make you as jealous as she is of that stupid prig, Penruddock; or was it your friend Lady Mary Thorncliffe? or was it—" and here it seemed as if Gilbert Ferrers had worked himself up into something like courage, as he added—"or was it that d—d fool, Scarsbrook?"

But the words were hardly out of his mouth before he regretted them. Myra's eyes dried in an instant: her contempt for the liar gave place to the assertion of her own honesty and dignity; and looking him down with a stare of defiance, she walked out of the room.

An hour afterwards he sent to know whether Mrs. Ferrers would be ready, as the carriage was coming round to be packed. Myra's maid brought word that Mrs. Ferrers was not going to leave home, but begged that she might make no difference to Mr. Ferrers' arrangements.

Nor did she; excepting this, that he added to his precious guests (Captain Barter and Sir Frederick Dunstan Lane, one a monopolist of all the tallow, and the other a monopolist of all the caviare in the world) one Mr. Percy Hard-

man, a gentleman whom he had not ventured to carry to Chester Street since a memorable dinner, at which he was found to be unfitted for ladies' society. There is no reason to doubt, however, that the alteration was displeasing to Gilbert Ferrers. "How could I be such a fool, when I'd the best of the argument, though the worst of the fact, as to provoke her in that way. I'm not such an idiot as to think that Scarsbrook cares for her, or has even pretended to do so; and after all, if she is provoking and obstinate, she's honest enough for a Lady Mayoress." Which compliment we trust the Lady Mayoresses will appreciate.

From this time there was no compromise, no surrender on either side. But we shall see that presently. A few lines will suffice for the Ascot week.

Who has not once been to that royal course? It was pre-eminently royal, not only because the *cortége* wends its way up the New Mile to the Royal Stand, with its carriages-and-four, its scarlet riders without and its indolent beauty within; but for its fashion, its natural charms, its company, and its absence of that crowd

which desecrates its rival, Epsom. But that is all over, and with its advantages the rail has broken its barrier of prestige and exclusiveness: its element is dust, and its present characteristic a pseudo-aristocracy.

Ferrers had taken—he was pleased to tell his wife borrowed—one of those cottages which lie within range of the heath itself—a white, verandahed cottage, with a small, well-kept lawn, a comfortable drawing and dining room for the accommodation of four or five persons, and a four-stalled stable, in which the family brougham or phaeton horse reposed, while the proprietor sought "fresh fields and pastures new" for the week just beginning. There was a cook—a very bad one—a housemaid, and a kitchen-maid: and the stableman was left to assist in doing the boots and shoes, knives, forks, and porterage, all at the moderate rate of fifty pounds for the week. It might have been a hundred for what Gilbert Ferrers cared. If he had a good week, the money would be nothing; and if not, he would evade payment. All that need not be considered till the following week.

Tuesday was lovely: sunshine, flowers, happy

faces, and Parisian toilettes. There were no boxes then, and the Stand shone forth like a parterre of loveliness. There was a time when there was no Grand Stand, and Chiswick fêtes and the Goodwood lawn paled their fires before the Ascot promenade. On the present occasion it left nothing to be desired. As Ferrers wandered up and down, he saw but few faces so lovely as that of Myra; but he had compounded for the society of his male friends, and when Mr. Percy Hardman insisted upon being his companion from the distance-post to the paddock, if Myra wanted revenge, she had it.

"Done anything to-day, Ferrers?" inquired an inquisitive friend.

"Yes; lost a raker." As he had laid against his own horse, which had run palpably unfit, it seems difficult to reconcile this with truth.

Wednesday, the pleasantest day of the meeting, was spoiled by the over-boiling of what racing men call "a pot;" a pot, indeed, in which Ferrers and his friends burnt their fingers. After dinner they played *ecarté*; but as Captain Barter and Sir Dunstan Lane would not go beyond a pound—or rather Ferrers got tired

of turning up kings for so little money—"Le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle," said he, explaining it by translating a pound of candles, and went to bed.

On the two days Gilbert Ferrers was about even—a trifle, perhaps, to the bad. He looked forward to the Cup-day as his great test of a successful meeting. That day did not belie its then reputation. The sun rose gloriously, the dust flew in clouds, the world came down on the wings of the wind and Newman's posters, the rail not as yet quite reaching the course, as now. As they whirled past the gate of Oak Lodge, many an acquaintance waved his or her hand in token of recognition, and some stopped to compare notes, to book a bet, to ask or to give information, and to drink of that cool claret cup which had emerged from the shades of Badminton many years before under its distinguishing name.

"What's to win, Ferrers?" said Cavendish Creeper, a young gentleman of boundless resources and very shallow brains, pulling up in a mail phaeton, as Ferrers and Sir Dunstan Lane stood, cup in hand, waiting for their guests.

"The Favourite, I should think," said Ferrers.

"He goes badly in the market," replied Cavendish Creeper.

"What odds are laid in London this morning about Mirabeau?"

"Seven to two," said the other, consulting a betting book.

"I'll lay you eight, if you like, in hundreds," said Ferrers. "I want to back Royalty, and to lay against Mirabeau." But Creeper declined.

"Done, sir," said an unknown voice from the other side of the phaeton, which had not yet spoken. "I'll take your eight hundred to two hundred,—Mr. Ferrers, I think," added he, taking out a betting-book, and writing down the bet. "And now I'll lay you the current odds against Royalty, if you like—he's quoted at five to one—to the same amount."

"Done," said Ferrers, with, however, some hesitation; and a shade of doubt passed over his face as he wrote down a thousand to two hundred about Royalty. "May I ask your name now, as we are strangers?"

"Henry Deloraine," said he; and Creeper

went through the ceremony of introducing them, a ceremony which he had before omitted.

"Au revoir," said Creeper, and Deloraine nodded his adieu, as the phaeton drove away towards the back of the Grand Stand. Ferrers, however, continued to stand looking after it, and repeating to himself, "Deloraine, Deloraine! I'd just as soon have done it with Creeper. Who the d—l was to guess that he'd have jumped down my throat in that way? I wonder whether Myra knows anything of his being in England!"

"Creeper, who's your friend?" said Deloraine to his young friend.

"His name's Ferrers. I only knew him in the City, you know," replied he, giving his whip a turn round his head. "Don't know where he comes from, not at all."

"Do your City friends do things like that?"

"Lor, bless you, yes. If it wasn't for them I should have been out of the service half a dozen times. They know the governor's good pay, some day or other."

"And is that your friend Mr. Ferrers' occupation?"

"Ferrers! Oh, bless you, no. He's a deuce of a swell. It's another fellow I got; and I've seen Ferrers there three or four times."

"What, after the same business?"

"He! Oh, no. He's a swell City man. Could buy up the National Debt or the Austrian Loan, or whatever it is."

"I hope he makes a book; for he's made two bad bets if he doesn't."

"He makes lots of money. And you should see his wife."

"Wife! What, you know his wife too? You're a pretty fellow, Cavendish."

"Don't I, that's all! Such a stunner! She lives at the West-end; regular swell."

"And who was she?" inquired Deloraine, without feeling particularly interested in the answer, but wishing to say something to his communicative friend.

"Oh, I forget. Somebody did tell me. A niece, or a ward, or something, of Fitzcourthope's, you know. Curious name. Something like Mary. Oh, Myra; that's it. Myra Gray. Lot's o' money. Jolly for him, wasn't it?" Saying which Mr. Cavendish Creeper pulled up

short in rounding the turn to the door of the Grand Stand, just in time to avoid running his pole into somebody's poll right in front of him. "Narrow shave, by Jove, wasn't it, Deloraine?"

"Yes; I think you'd have taken the scalp as well as the hair, if you'd gone through." He said nothing about the chignons, which were then not invented.

About two o'clock it was perceived by the occupiers of the Stand that the sun was somewhat overcast, and that it was much pleasanter in consequence. In half an hour more the wind rose from the south-east, the clouds scudded across the sky in the direction of the kennels and Windsor, and in half an hour more the rain came on with that drenching perseverance so characteristic of an English summer's day. The veriest tyro could tell that we are in for a wet evening; and the provoking part of the business is that the extreme beauty of the morning disarms precaution, and sends out the victim really dressed for the sacrifice she is to adorn.

On the day of which we write, by the time the saddling for the Cup had been finished, the British public might have walked upon the tops

of the open umbrellas. Those useful implements of war against the elements presented one vast roof of the *testudo*, as against the battering-rams of heaven. Not a bonnet, not a hat, not a face, so eloquently conspicuous ten minutes before, was now to be seen upon the course. Nature was against the pleasure-seekers; and the money-makers were regardless of drought or rain in their godless expedition. They were much more solicitous as to what man could do against them, than Providence, on the Cup-day at Ascot.

Ferrers was standing a great stake upon this race. He had backed Royalty upon the strength of some private information, on which he thought he could depend. He had laid against Mirabeau upon the strength of a robbery, in which he himself bore a prominent part. Our old acquaintance, Mr. Trapman, had been employed by the owner to back the horse, and upon the information which he had given to Percy Hardman it was at first decided to act. But Percy Hardman, having his doubts whether winning was a certainty, and finding the horse already at very short odds, determined upon get-

ting hold of the jockey. Having ascertained that the boy's honesty was a mere question of price, he began to lay for himself and Ferrers against him. The consequence of this demonstration was, that Trapman, in the interests of the owner, ceased to back him; and the fluctuations in the market rendering the horse a worse favourite, on the morning of the race he had gone to four to one. By the time Cavendish Creeper, Deloraine, and Ferrers, and his friends, met on the course, the horse had received an additional downward impetus.

"What's the matter with Mirabeau?" said Deloraine to a ring-man, who was thundering at the top of his voice, "I lay agin Miruboo!"

"Had a bad night, sir; that's all. His owner ain't backing him; but I'll take your seven to one with a start, though I don't back one often."

Deloraine laughed, and turned away to the friendly shelter of another umbrella. It was currently reported that his number would not go up; and Ferrers watched for number six with a craven heart and a blanched cheek. It was no question of railway securities, scrip, paper, or

any sort of bill on which money could be raised under given circumstances. It was a question of so many hundreds of pounds in bank-notes, to be paid at Tattersall's on Monday morning, and which would have to be got should the horse win.

He stood by himself, regardless of the rain, when number six was figured on the board. He seized a pair of glasses from the hand of a meek-looking stranger, and looked through them. "Yes, it's number six, and to be ridden by their own boy, Lyall. Then it's all right still." And he turned round and walked down the course towards the start. He was too anxious to go and look at them.

"They're off!" And the sea of umbrellas was agitated, as they reached, and pushed, and struggled, and jumped, to catch a sight of them. Not so Ferrers, who scarcely heeded them as they swept up towards the Stand, and out of sight. He was thinking how far young Lyall could be depended upon to sell his master. The price he knew was good, and he waited to see them come round the turn into the straight run up.

At length they came, and then he looked, and there, next the rails, full of running, hard held, but not by Lyall, was Mirabeau. He was no judge of pace; but instinct told him that his fate was sealed. He was done; and the thousand must be got by Monday morning. He had not seen the board taken down, and the name of the jockey altered, when he turned away to walk down to the start. Otherwise something might have been saved from the fire.

But he was not in these matters a coward. So he walked up through the torrents of rain to the Stand; and as he walked the crowd still said to one another and to him, "Mirabeau—number six—cleverly—by half a length—but pretty easy. And Royalty—yes—number thirteen—second." There was the board still up, from which there was no appeal.

Gilbert Ferrers was not a person for whom we bespeak sympathy. He was a hard, selfish, dishonest villain; who cared no more for the widows and orphans whom he had swallowed in his rapacious maw, in this venture and in that, than I care for this paper before it is written on. He knew whither he had lead many, and where

he was leading more. But now he was stopped. Here was the end of all his labours. Monday was the termination of the great City financier—director—manager—unable to show at Tattersall's. Here was his power gone, his horses, his carriages, his house, furniture, and all for which he had lived. All knocked down by the fatal hammer of self-deception. And had he not one thought for Myra in it all? Not one; excepting as an additional incumbrance. Nor for Mathilde, the woman he professed to love, and for whom he sacrificed peace at home? Not one; excepting as a still greater incumbrance than the other.

Having ascertained beyond all doubt that Mirabeau had won, Gilbert Ferrers walked off the course to his temporary home. As his friends stayed out the day's racing, notwithstanding the wet, he had plenty of time for reflection. A journey to London on the morrow was an absolute necessity. Nor did he well see how he could manage without Mr. Percy Hardman. That gentleman had, by means of his own or his father's, kept Ferrers' head above water with a pertinacity and strength which reminded one of

an able and powerful swimmer supporting a drowning man.

There was a reason for this. Percy Hardman required for his success in life, and in his own way it appeared to have been great, the countenance of a gentleman, or what he called a swell. Gilbert Ferrers exactly answered to his idea of a swell. He was well-looking, well-dressed, had reputable associates, and a name and house well known west of Temple Bar.

Besides this, old Hardman was a bill discounter of extensive practice; and though generally cautious enough, he had imbibed the notion that Ferrers was, either in himself or by his wife's connections and friends, a man of property. He knew that as a man of business his talents were beyond mediocrity; and he had great faith in the schemes he supported, and the airs he assumed. He always thought that if the day of reckoning was far off, it was certain and remunerative. It was by these means, and the ready money which he had commanded in his wife's name, that Gilbert Ferrers had been enabled to spend as much again as he had, to sink much money in devices which repaid him

only an income derivable from his energies and work, and to amass debts which nothing but very successful ventures could enable him to clear off. As long as he could have the luxuries he desired, he had no wish to clear off anything.

After dinner, then, having left Captain Barter and St. Dunstan Lane to their *ecarté*, the associates, who were shortly to become confederates, strolled into the garden.

"How much do you say you have lost to-day?" said Hardman, with no affectation of delicacy; a quality in which they were both deficient.

"I can't do with less than three thousand," said the other.

"It's a good deal of money, old fellow; and no available security."

"About three months' expenditure, I should think;" and he then enumerated his sources of legitimate income with a degree of truth not common to him. Perhaps he knew that deception was useless; and he was a sufficiently good financier not to throw away even a lie without an expectation of profit from it.

Hardman listened to the enumeration of these

sources on which he was to raise a large sum of money, and said abruptly—

"Can't you ensure your life for something respectable?"

"Perhaps I could, if I hadn't done so already, and raised as much money on it as it will bear."

Ferrers talked to Hardman now with more truth than most people employ towards their family lawyer.

"The d—l you have. Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"Because there was no necessity for it as long as I could get money without the disclosure."

"Well, perhaps you're right. I'll tell you what, Ferrers, you're a deuced clever fellow. I don't know a cooler hand than you, excepting——"

"Don't be shy of mentioning any exceptions. There must be plenty of your acquaintance."

"Not many; but I was thinking of my own father. I believe he could raise fifty thousand pounds to-morrow; and I don't believe he has as many pence. But you must have this three thousand, must you?"

"Undoubtedly; and by Monday morning."

It was too dark to see the flush on Ferrers' face, but he felt it; and not a little of it came from the sense of indignity he was suffering at the hands of one whom he was pleased to regard as an inferior.

"And what's the alternative?"

"I must go." And the confession was made in a rather lower tone of voice.

"Go! No; that won't do, or several others must go too. We must try and keep you where you are till the shares in the Buncombe Bank are got rid of. I've five hundred of 'em myself, and the governor as many more."

"Then what's to be done?"

"Well, don't be alarmed. You must become one of us."

"I should like to know the meaning of 'becoming one of us.'" And here Gilbert Ferrers suddenly stopped in his walk, as if impressed with the necessity of a clearer definition.

"We don't divulge the secrets of the prison-house to outsiders. Say the word. It's a good business. We want a head; and we can make room for you." Here Percy Hardman chuckled as if he had been offering his friend a partner-

ship in Overend, Gurney's, or a commissionership of Bankruptcy. "You'll have to go in three months' time if you can't put your hand on some money; and I've no other way to help you. You needn't be squeamish. I think if you were to go now, they wouldn't be over nice about bringing you back again to appear at the Central Criminal Court. But there's no necessity for that. There are scores of directors of all sorts of things no better than you—well then, us, if you like it better. But we'll go to town to-morrow, and arrange this business; and I think you won't object to become one of us."

CHAPTER X.

DELORAINE ATTEMPTS TO REFORM "THE FINEST PISANTRY IN THE WORLD."

IT is enough here to say that, from the day on which Myra and her husband had last quarrelled, they remained at a fashionable degree of indifference. The thermometer never moved. They were never ill-tempered, nor was he ever rude. He had brains enough to see that his last effort had cost him everything else that his imperturbable coolness might have gained him. To compare small things with great, Henry II. erred in the same way, and reaped the same reward of an overbearing, though momentary, forgetfulness, when he sighed for the death of an archbishop. The luxury was too great to be had for nothing;

and it cost him a life's management and his prestige.

Having said thus much that the reader may not feel uncomfortable about the principal actor and actress, we must go back in our story to Ireland.

Deloraine returned from abroad when he had ascertained beyond all question that Myra Gray was married to Mr. Ferrers. The worst part of the business was the complete mystery which surrounded Gilbert Ferrers himself. Nobody seemed to know anything about him in England, Ireland, or Scotland. It was clear that he had made no mark in the world for his wealth, talents, or goodness; and nobody but his own father had accused him of being distinguished for crime, which he himself had condoned. He was not, therefore, so easily to be found, as if he had been a Rothschild, a Gladstone, a Peabody, or a Thistlewood.

But Deloraine had no certain evidence that this man who had run away from Schlagstein was Dick Fetherstone's son and heir. Upon application to that gentleman, he had not been able to ascertain the name by which his sup-

posititious son had gone. The original agent or commissioner employed by Fetherstone was dead; had died after giving all the information that Dick cared to have; that his son was living without picking pockets, and was called——well! something or other, not Fetherstone. Dick had quite forgotten; begged that he might never hear his name mentioned again, dead or alive; and had tried to ignore the name he had adopted. He was in some mercantile situation, heaven knows what, said Dick. "If he's getting forty shillings a week it's thirty more than he deserves. But he's bad enough for anything; and if he has run away with Miss Gray or her money, he'll make her miserable and wretched. I wish you could have prevented it; and all you can hope now, is, that it may be some other blackguard, for there can't be two as bad as my son."

"Was his name Ferrers?"

Dick Fetherstone rubbed his chin solemnly.

"Ferrers! Ferrers! Well, perhaps it might be. I can't say. The information of his return to the country at all came to me accidentally, in a roundabout way; for unpaid agents, like

unpaid magistrates, never know anything." Deloraine winced and laughed, for he was one of them, as, indeed, had been his friend. "I don't think he mentioned the name, though he must know it; but he told me, as I told you circumstantially, that he was making love to a girl *en pension* at a Mrs. Montressor's at Schlagstein —the information came through a woman; jealousy, I suppose—that he had been there twice or thrice; and that the object of his present absence from his work was the ruin of the girl. Whether there was any one else at Mrs. Montressor's, I can't say, that could answer the description; but knowing your interest in poor Fitzcourthope's family, I thought it my duty to give you the intelligence I had."

"Thanks, most hearty thanks. Well! I was too late; but if I ever come across Myra, I shall be forearmed. And this informant you say is dead?"

"Indeed he is—but lately. He was an old and clever *employé* of mine; and, having been considerably benefited by me in my young days, undertook the task for me gratuitously. I've told you my opinion of gratuitous service."

"And you've not replaced him?"

"No; why should I. The police may do that for me if it ever becomes necessary."

And after this rather curious and very unsatisfactory conversation with his eccentric countryman, it was Deloraine's turn to ride home now.

Lady Honoria Berrylands and her sister, not usually bad girls in the main, declined to hear any more about Myra Gray. "Her conduct had been very bad. Girls who set up for knowing better than the rest of the world always came to grief. Girls that took a line of their own always got off the rails." And if Lady Honoria convinced Deloraine of nothing else, she did so of her talent for metaphor; a talent of which women are proud, and in which they are very deficient. But the fact is, that these ladies had discovered that Deloraine was too fond of talking about Myra; and now, that she had justly forfeited their esteem, it would be a good opportunity to drop her. These two ladies were very good, cheerful girls enough, but not at all likely to offend against conventionality, so they could censure those that did so *nullo periculo.*

Moreover, they had rather given up Deloraine of late. He was very useful to them and their brother about their father's affairs; but then, as their brother had the lion's share of the remnant, it was Courthope's business to be grateful and gracious for the family. And he was so to his father's old friend. But Fitz, as he was called by his intimates, had very few tastes in common with Henry Deloraine, beyond his love for the Ward Union staghounds or the Blazers, least of all a taste for Myra Gray, whose pretty face he had hardly ever looked at, excepting over the top of a pinafore, and whom he rather remembered with a misty feeling of dislike, as having lamed his ponies, and tangled his fishing tackle almost beyond the power of disentanglement for useful purposes.

"Myra Gray," said he to Henry Deloraine; "I suppose the old earl did pretty well for her,—so the girls say; and she's done very badly for herself. I don't see the use of looking after her, now she's a husband of her own. Besides, all her family live in England, you know. Of course, if you think I ought, I don't mind being

civil to her; but Honor's sure to make the d—l's own row about it."

This sort of acquiescence was not encouraging, for to say the truth, Deloraine's advice was selfish, as men's advice generally is. Now that the girl was married it could be no business of his to know how she was going on, but he could not help feeling an interest in her; and if Fitzcourthope and his sisters would not have her at the Castle, it was clear that he need no longer dwell on the charms of the wild English girl, who had thriven so wonderfully in a foreign soil. Fitzcourthope could not have her at the Castle, for one, if for no other, reason, that he had no idea where she was. One person, to be sure, might have told him; but when he was in London, which was only twice for short periods, he thought neither of Blunt and Co. nor the family solicitors, excepting as the readiest and cheapest channels of raising money to pay his expenses.

Just now, too, Henry Deloraine had neither time nor money to spend in his usual London season. Much had been said about Irish absenteeism, the Irish tenant-right, and the

Irish Church. All these questions demanded an honest landlord's time and strictest attention. Henry Deloraine was a very conscientious fellow. He took a broad view of absenteeism. He would not shut his eyes to this fact, that a good man owed something more than the whole of his income to the soil whence he derived it. He owed his example, and the influence of his own conduct and advice, to his tenants. He knew that he had a much better chance of arriving at the truth by remaining on the spot to investigate grievances, whether of tenant-right or religion, than by parading the Row or hunting in Leicestershire or Rutland. He did think occasionally of his chance of falling in with Myra once more; and it is so flattering to a man's strength of mind to be watching virtuously over the fortunes of another man's wife! but he was a man who, having once selected a text to preach a sermon upon, was sure to stick to it. In the present case he did so for two winters and two springs; and it was only in June of the second year of Mrs. Ferrers' married life, that Deloraine had found it necessary to go to London.

As the immediate motive power which sent him up is connected with some of the *dramatis personæ* of our story, the episode may not be out of place. Those who will not waste their time upon Ireland and the Irish may be satisfied with the fact that he was there; but I hope better things of the majority.

For a length of time Deloraine's estates had been managed by an agent, jointly with some few more gentlemen, like himself, of easy fortune and still easier temper. They believed themselves to be entitled to their rents (or some part of them, to put it modestly and practically) in consideration for the money they or their forefathers had paid for the estates. They took generally what they could get, grumblingly; but without exercising undue severity, either by ejection or distraint. The tenants believed otherwise. They had some curious notions about land-tenure, that the Saxon was an interloper, who, whether three hundred years before or six hundred made no difference, had no sort of right to any rent. This idea, moreover, induced another very prominent obstacle on the estates of Henry Deloraine. His pro-

perty had several small holdings upon it among the larger ones, containing, some twenty, some thirty, some fifty acres, and others not more than fifteen. Now the largest of these is not too much to maintain a family reasonably, and the smallest is next thing to starvation. But Deloraine's tenants and many others, from long immunity, had subdivided and underlet these after such a fashion, that not a family, but a tribe of Doolans, and Nolans, and Kerrys, and Murphys, subsisted in their way upon what certainly had been let to their elders alone. The young birds clung to the nest, however, erecting a second mud hut, and then another mud hut,—a pig-stye, in which they all lived decently for the pigs, a cabin in which they all lived indecently for the human beings. They fought, married, cursed, danced, drank whisky, and grew potatoes, and believed themselves wronged when the agent called for the rent, and threatened them with Mr. Deloraine's displeasure if it were not paid.

"Divil fly away wid ye, ye dirty Englisher. Will the master come to look for himself? You've had a long wick for a long time, ye

farthin' rushlight, you; and we'll put ye out altogether." Which language, or something like it, was repeated pretty constantly; so constantly that they got to think very little of acting upon it.

And it came to pass about that time that they shot an agent or two.

Mr. Deloraine never asked anybody to do anything which he was afraid to do himself; so he discarded his agent, and took to doing the dirty and dangerous work in his place. He knew the Irish pretty well, thoroughly indeed. He neither mistook them for Englishmen nor aboriginal South Sea Islanders, though he believed them to be almost as much like the latter as the former. He knew that they were warm-hearted, affectionate, easily led, never convinced, revengeful, idle, by times laborious, generous, drunken, chaste, liars, brave in success, cowardly in defeat; in fact, that nobody could make head or tail of them by the rule of thumb, but that much might be done for them by no rule at all.

They were very much flattered at first by his condescension; and they promised this, that, and the other, without the slightest hesitation.

"Would they emigrate? he would pay their passage, remit their arrears, furnish tools, and give a five-pound note to each man to start him, and three pounds to the women as dower money." "Bedad, was it immigrate? wouldn't they go to a hotter place than Australia to plase his honour." Some declined to emigrate, but promised not to sublet or subdivide their land; and if Tim would set up for himself, would his honour do something for him?" Yes, his honour would give them all a chance. So some of them did emigrate; others took his money and came skulking back again in no time; and Tim had a trifle to set himself up with, and never went farther than the parental loft, which he shared with a couple of rabbits, half a dozen hens, and a sucking pig, which was grown too big to come down-stairs any more.

One thing among them annoyed Deloraine exceedingly. An agent had been shot at on his estate, and he endeavoured to make them feel that it reflected some disgrace among the people on whose lands it had happened. He signally failed to do so. The tribes kept their secret, better than Irish secrets of the sort are generally

kept. Conviction failed in two instances, and then the thing passed off, as if an agent more or less, in a neighbourhood where there was nothing but potatoes for him to feed on, and not too many of those, could be but a matter of small importance. But it must be admitted that Deloraine was far more successful than his neighbours or his agents had been. Subletting, the curse of the land, began to be modified very considerably; and sub-division took place in few instances, and under the rose: for an Irishman would evade anything, from "yes" or "no" to a mad bull or a hansom cab. Deloraine congratulated himself. He had not been away, it is true, but he was doing his duty, and he thought, or tried to think, that if all other landed proprietors would do the same, his country would be a happier and more prosperous one. So it would be.

Still it is a country in which much tact is required to avoid a difficulty. "The finest pisantry in the world" will misunderstand you, or cheat you, or laugh at you, or murder you, if they take it into their heads to do so. If a strong man of evil counsels gets an influence over them, God

help you. It is not that they are without principle, but they are without the principles which spring from conviction. They are without settled principles. Therefore, the lower orders of Irish never argue: even mentally. They only quarrel. But they had not quarrelled with Deloraine, for he had many of the qualities they love. He was tall, strong, handsome;—how like savages! They had no respect for his intelligence, but they delighted in his horsemanship. He was courageous, truthful (they saw its beauty in him), just, and generous. Often giving away, but never releasing his grasp of the rent, which he only returned under protest in accident or misfortune. He had had two years of it, and his perseverance was beginning to bear fruit. The priest, a good old man, pointed out to them the blessings of such a rule.

But there arose one drawback to all this, which began to be felt as an intolerable burden. Several reforms had been introduced among them by slow degrees; they had grown imperceptibly: a little more education among the children, not pushed too far, or troubling the adults; an occasional implement of farming

hitherto unknown among them; a recommendation (nothing more) to drain, drain-pipes inclusive; some stockings, coarse, but good, in the place of hay-bands; a clock in the cottages, an occasional brush and comb, and a gridiron. These they bore hardly, especially when they found that they excited the envy or sarcasm of their neighbours; for your true Irishman is not ambitious, and he is highly susceptible of sarcasm. But it is the last straw that breaks the camel's back. Not satisfied with his reforms, Deloraine recommended soap. They wanted it terribly. The cold water, which was sparingly applied from the pump, served not to open the pores; there was a fever or two in the village, and a fear of more. As a sanatory measure washing was prescribed: washing not only of the linen, but of the person, and that with soap.

This was too much. They had borne with him. When he handled their rights on the land, and insisted on the "rint;" when he touched the sanctity of their industry and experience, and brought in his "dhrainin' an' his pipin'," hadn't they danced to it? More by token the new stockings chafed their legs, and

the combs and the brushes pulled out their hair. "But soap," said the burly ruffian who presided over their meetings when anything went wrong; "soap! by the soul o' my grandmother, it's an attack upon the personal liberties o' the subject! I'll be sorry for it, but, by Gorra, Mr. Deloraine must die."

On this subject, however, there was some difference of opinion, for Deloraine had made friends among the cottars on his estate by many personal acts of kindness. To one he had sent a pig, to another a gate to his stye to put it in, to the third a side of bacon, to the fourth doctor's attendance for a sick wife, and to a fifth a sovereign, when he stood much in need of it. But there was a truculent ferocity about Tim Doolan, the aforesaid ruffian, which stood him in stead of energy, and which affected this unlettered mass much as the high leaven affects an educated crowd.

There was a strange method in these matters with the Irish, and while acting with most illogical and illegal manner, they liked to imitate the virtue to which they were in truth most opposed. They met almost in solemn con-

clave at one another's houses; they talked over the enormities of a man who had made them better, had given them bread by the sweat of their own brows, and who insisted, as a condition of his continued favour and their continued tenancy, that they should keep themselves, their children, and their houses, clean.

From these discussions they carefully excluded all those who were supposed to be really favourable to Deloraine and his reforms. Here and there at first a pertinent question or two was asked.

"Eh, Tim, but he's a good man, and what 'll we do when he's gone?"

To which Mike Nolan would reply—

"Was ye ready wid' the rint, Kerry?"

"Well, I was; it was through him sending down his cart to help me. I don't know that ye'll have a better when he's gone."

"Won't the land be your own, Kerry, man alive? Faix he hasn't chick nor child; and won't we come by our own?"

This reasoning was unanswerable; and as the honester and better class were excluded, it imposed upon the ignorant; and the majority carried the day.

At one of these meetings it had at length been determined that Henry Deloraine should suffer: and it now remained only to cast lots for the enviable distinction of becoming the assassin.

It so happened that among these men there was one who had lately returned to his native country and to his home. His father had been a tenant of Deloraine's, and was one of those who chose to consider himself aggrieved by the stringent rules which had been issued with regard to the sub-division of the small holdings. At this point Deloraine, who knew the mischief of such tenures, had been most emphatic and unswerving.

Michael Nolan had, therefore, joined the insurgents, and his son, who was something of a burden to his father (though the old man could not see, by parity of reasoning, that his son would be equally so if he had been permitted to give him up a third of his seven acres, on which to raise a hut and a family), had attended the meetings with him. No suspicions were entertained of Peter Nolan; and when at length he found himself confronted with the necessity of drawing a lot for the very question-

able honour of taking an innocent man's life, Peter for the first time realised the unpleasant peculiarity of his situation.

He was on what is called the "horns of a dilemma." If the lot fell upon him, one of two things would certainly happen. Either he must undertake the responsibility of the position, or be prepared to surrender his own life to the blood-thirsty propensities of Mr. Timothy Doolan. That gentleman, who was so ready to vote the death of a landlord, would not be particular about throwing in a possible informer. He had heard too much now, or had dared too little; and in this very unpleasant state of suspense he threw himself back (Hibernicé) on the calculation of chance; it was just eleven to one against him—an Englishman would have said in his favour.

After an impressive speech, which began by enumerating the virtues of the victim, passed on to the oppressions of England, the land tenure, the Church, and the capability of the Irish to live upon "just nothing at all, if they'd lave us alone," and finished by an intimation that great excellence only made Sassenach despotism more

deserving of punishment, Mr. Doolan smote the table with a fist whose colour and consistency showed that he for one had successfully resisted all suggestions of soap and water.

"He's the best of 'em, and it makes him the best to be took off. Won't it be a warning to the others that'll come in his place. Pass round the hat boys. The ticket with the death's head and cross-bones wins."

The first attempt was unsuccessful, owing to the fact that the ballot-box had no crown to it; but a second was found without this obstacle, and the drawing proceeded.

Four or five eager hands were pushed forward, and the gloating eyes seemed almost disappointed that Providence had not selected their hands to be washed in blood. Nine lots had been drawn blank, when it came to the turn of Peter Nolan. He knew his countrymen, and he therefore knew his danger. With strong repression of feeling, while the blood deserted his extremities and rushed rapidly to his heart, leaving him pale as death, he opened the lot. He saw it almost instinctively before he unfolded the fatal paper. There, in the centre,

was the rudely imitated skull and cross-bones —no great symbol of the limner's art, but more unmistakably the symbol of a bloody deed to be done. Tightly in his hand Nolan held the lot, and the rest crowded round, almost jealous, as it would seem, of the honour that had fallen on him, a comparative stranger.

Not in reality, however, were they envious. They saw nothing of his pale face and quivering lips; but they knew how glad they themselves were to have escaped the ordeal. One or two only—the president especially—talked to him of his country's good, of the vengeance he would inflict for his poor old father, and the life of self-gratulation he might lead. The details were left to himself; but it was concluded that from behind a wall, with the family musket, a sure aim and safety were best to be secured.

Whether Tim Doolan had observed unwonted signs of trepidation in Peter or not, I don't know; but to make assurance doubly sure, the ruffian, to the increased disquietude of the selected assassin, proposed himself as an associate in the murder.

Peter Nolan had not been fed upon buttermilk

and potatoes all his life, or he might have been more bloodthirsty. He had been in England, and lived lately upon Sassenach beef, which had made him soft, as we shall see.

No sooner was the meeting broken up than Peter Nolan went home. Fortunately for him, he lived in a small hut on his father's holding by himself. Here he shut himself up, and endeavoured to determine upon some course by which, without betraying his accomplices, he could escape from his perilous situation.

Henry Deloraine's house was about five miles from this place. Having lain down in bed early, in anticipation of some congratulatory or consolatory visits he might expect, and which, of course were paid, he waited till midnight. Rising quietly, he dressed himself, and started for Mr. Deloraine's residence. He calculated his time; an hour to go, an hour to explain his mission, and an hour to return before it should be light. It was as much as he could do.

Away he went, and traversing the country, which he knew well, he reached his destination within the time. A most fortunate circumstance assisted him; Deloraine had only reached home

half-an-hour, and was still up. Peter Nolan, to the surprise of the butler, and in a state of considerable excitement, was admitted to Deloraine's presence.

"Sit down, Nolan," said he, continuing to write; but Nolan twisted his hat, and then smoothed it, and declined to sit down. The butler left the room.

"Now, Nolan, what's the matter? It's scarcely a time of night to be running about the country. Is the father's house burnt down, or the new ricks?"

"Oh, oh! neither, your honour. It's not burning; it's murder."

"Murder!" said he, rising, and really thinking that he was likely to be wanted in his magisterial capacity. "Murder, man! Out with it. who is it?"

"Och, faith it's yourself, sir. They'll murder ye! I know it all. They'll have your life, Mr. Deloraine—like Walker's; him they shot awhile ago!"

"Nonsense, Nolan! I've not an enemy in the place. Who'll do it?"

"Och, your honour, you'll forgive me? You'll

swear it by the blessed saints? You'll promise by everything that's holy?" and he threw himself on his knees at his feet, and the tears ran down his cheks.

"But who is it? Who's to do it?" repeated Deloraine, drawing back.

"But will you swear? They'll kill me if they know it. Swear you'll not betray me, Mr. Deloraine, and I'll tell ye all."

Deloraine, who knew the people well, began to have some inkling of the business in hand.

"Then, Nolan, I'll promise. You know my word 's as good as an oath any day. Nobody shall harm you; nobody shall know. Get up; there's a good fellow. And now tell me all about it. Who's the man?"

"Faith, it's myself, that wouldn't harm a hair of your head; but they've drawn me to do it, and they'll kill me if they know it." His agitation was considerable, and as Deloraine rose to ring the bell, Nolan again threw himself on his knees. "Your word, your word, Mr. Deloraine! You'll never tell against me?"

"No, no. Sit up;" and he forced him into a

chair. "You shall have some whisky, and then you'll tell me all. Now be quiet, while I ring;" saying which, he rang the bell, and ordering his servant to bring what was necessary, he desired him to wait till he rang again, as a bed might be wanted for Nolan.

Having soothed him by promises and reassured him by whisky, poor Peter, with considerable circumlocution, got through his story.

Deloraine was astounded; but he could see no reason to doubt the truth of what he had heard—the more so as there sat before him his intended assassin.

"And now, Peter, what do you mean to do? You'll go with me to the magistrates to-morrow morning, and swear all this."

Peter's face fell.

"I'll be a dead man in four-and-twenty hours. You promised me, your honour."

"So he would," thought Deloraine. "What a wonderful country it is! He'd be dead, and possibly I should come next. Law won't do here. What do you propose?"

"If your honour 'd only let me have a shot at ye."

Deloraine laughed at the notion, to the bewilderment of Peter.

"No; I'm afraid that won't do, Nolan, unless I'm to have one at you too."

"It's just what I was going to say. I'd miss you, and they'd know I'd done it; and then your honour 'd just ride up to the wall, and you'd point your pistol and take me prisoner," said Peter, with much simplicity.

"And then you'd be hanged. That wouldn't do you much good."

"Oh, no! it 'ud be all in fun, like. And you'd bring me back here; and I'm sure you'd take care of me, an' get me away to England. I'm almost tired of the ould country already. I can't make myself decent, as I've been accustomed to do, without their pokin' their fun at me. I've been a groom, an' if you'd get me a place away from here I'd be glad. But I'll be forced to shoot at your honour before I go."

Deloraine was mightily tickled with the conceit of the thing, though not feeling very much pleased with the result of his labours among the tenants.

"And now you'll let me go, sir; for I'm bound to be back before daylight, and I haven't too much time."

"Good. Now look here: you'll be at the cross-roads at Penhoola the day after to-morrow. It's a lonely spot, and you know the wall. At eight o'clock in the evening I shall be passing."

"You'll have a servant. And would your honour come on wheels? for, when you catch me, you'll bring me away here. When I'm caught, you know it's no fault o' mine if I'm forced to tell. But I couldn't do it before." Saying which, Peter made for the door, and was off again, with a very easy conscience as regarded Deloraine, and a very uneasy one as regarded the tribe he had left sleeping over their day's work.

To make a long story short: on the day fixed, Deloraine and a well-tried and well-armed servant drove along the Penhoola road—a miserable cart-rut over a mountain, and within a short distance of Deloraine's property. They were scarcely at the stone-wall of the cross-roads, when a man's head rose, and a fowling-

piece went off; the horse was stopped, and out jumped Mr. Deloraine.

"You've missed him, Peter; run for it!" and away went two figures.

Deloraine fired, and Peter Nolan fell head over heels. His companion gave one look round, and redoubled his efforts. Deloraine ran to the fallen Peter.

"Not yet, yer honour, not yet. Wait till that murderin' ruffian, Tim Doolan, is out of sight; he'll tell 'em all I'm dead, an' ye'll never be shot at any more. The blackguard 'll be out o' the counthry before to-morrow, and so will I, too, if you'll only give me a help."

Deloraine laughed as he picked up the pretended assassin, and took him to his gig. But in another half hour Deloraine was at home, safe and sound, and Peter was regaling himself in the back kitchen, George having been sworn to secrecy in the meantime.

"Now, Peter," said the master, the next morning, "what's to be done for you? You can't stop here. What are you fit for?"

Peter Nolan then related to Deloraine his past experiences, and present capability, as a groom,

a coachman, or servant of all work. Like many Irishmen of his class, there were few things he did not think himself fit for.

"And where did you live last in England?" said Deloraine.

"I lived in the service of Mr. Ferrers," replied he.

Deloraine did not notice the name.

"In the house? Was there a mistress, or was your master a bachelor?"

"Indeed, then, there was a mistress," replied Nolan, with a foolish but comical expression of face, which Deloraine did not understand.

"Mrs.—ah! what did you say her name was? Mrs. Ferrers?"

"Well, sir," said the man, nearly twisting the brim off his hat, "it wasn't just Mrs. Ferrers that I lived with and drove; the lady I mean lived near Hastings."

"Ah! I see. Then there was no Mrs. Ferrers;" and an idea he had half formed again passed from his mind. "Mr. Ferrers was not married."

"Indeed was he. Mrs. Ferrers lived in London, in a very fine house, though I never saw

her. He never brought the regular servants down to us, nor took me to town."

"Then who was this lady, who's to give you what she don't seem to have had herself?"

"We used to call her Mrs. Bransome; but that wasn't her right name: it was a foreign name—Mathilde something, sir; but, begorra! I most forget. I've heard it, or seen it written, but I can't just put my tongue to it. Mathilde von—von——"

"It wasn't Von Robeck?" inquired Deloraine, growing interested.

"That's it, sir. Mrs. Ferrers lived in London. It was too bad; but they said that he had run away with her, and now they didn't live happily. There's may be faults on both sides, your honour. Most times there is with us poor folks."

"You never saw Mrs. Ferrers, then, in London, nor anywhere else, that you know of?"

"Never, sir. But I'm most sure I see the other lady—the wrong Mrs. Ferrers; and it was down here; the day your honour went to meet Lord Fitzcourthope at the ruins, when you lunched in the old castle. I was there in the mornin', and I'd most swear I saw this Mrs. ——

faith! I'll never know them foreign names!—along wid the gentlefolks; leastway, if it wasn't impossible."

Deloraine stood with his back to the mantelpiece a few minutes, lost in thought. It was this Ferrers undoubtedly. It was that mysterious Mathilde, of whom he had first heard at a Greenwich dinner—the embryo *actrice*, or artiste—whom he had again seen at the ruins, and who had assisted in the elopement of Myra and Ferrers. The gloomy story was gradually unfolding itself before him; and if ever he had loved Myra Gray, which he scarcely allowed himself to doubt, he certainly entertained at this moment a genuine pity for Myra Ferrers.

"You'd like to try your fortune in England again, Nolan?"

"I would, sir. Ireland's no place for the likes o' me. I've none o' them murtherin' tastes as Tim Doolan, and I'd like a bit o' soap in the water betimes."

"Will you go with me to-morrow or the day after? I needn't take a servant."

"I'll do for your honour."

"So you promised the tribe at Penhoola."

"Ach! shure you're hard upon a poor fellow. But you're safe from this time, Mr. Deloraine. The luck's again 'em, and they'll know I'm dead."

"Well, then, if you'll go with me, you shall. Stop here till then. It's men like your father, Peter, and Tim Doolan, and fellows of that class, that are always howling about the old country, that are doing it more mischief than all the Englishmen and Protestants in the world."

"Sure your honour knows best. I'll not go back to 'em while I can get bread elsewhere."

"You'd better not. They've their good qualities as well as their bad ones. But when a man has once lived among civilised beings, he's unfit for savage life. There was a great friend of your people once—you've heard speak of Lord Edward Fitzgerald and the great rebellion—who thought otherwise; but he came to a bad end, after doing more mischief than we've ever been able to mend in all these years since his death. You shall know

when we start, and hold your tongue in the meantime."

Peter bowed his adieus, and two days after they sailed for England. That is what brought Deloraine to the Ascot Cup.

CHAPTER XI.

DELORAINE SCENTS A MYSTERY.

THE settling for the Ascot week had passed over without much difficulty. There were a few defaulters, not many. It had been a bad week for the gentlemen; but they had paid up. The Duke of A—— was a heavy loser; so were the Marquis of B——, Earl C——, and Squire D——. Nobody ever expected to see the Marquis of B—— again; but he came down like a man, notes in hand, to the tune of some seventy thousand, and paid his creditors himself. He let a few odd thousands stand over among his personal friends; but that was their business, not ours; and if they did not halloo, why should we?

One thing made it very pleasant. A dirty little sporting paper printed all their names in full, as the heaviest losers known for a long time; and then lavished editorial praise upon them, as "noble, honourable, plucky, and upright men; who had set a splendid example to the nobility and gentry of England by such a disinterested measure as paying their debts of honour."

They scarcely seemed to have appreciated his patronage, for they forgot to present him with a testimonial of their regard, excepting Squire D——, who, being a choleric county gentleman, and accustomed to pay his debts, called at the office, and thrashed the editor within an inch of his life. An indignant jury awarded the ill-used man a farthing damages.

Among the settlers, too, was Gilbert Ferrers. So he had got the money. Perhaps he was not actuated by the same high motives which induces a gentleman to pay what he has lost. There might be another reason for his punctuality; that, like many others in that crowded arena, or like the celebrated Colonel Charteris, he found ready payment the best policy. "I'd give

fifty thousand pounds for a character, for if I had it I'm sure I could make double the money." When Philip of Macedon and Hiero of Syracuse, the gentlemen-jockeys of the Olympic Games, won at Elis, they hardly received a like compliment, I should think.

If the Ascot meeting breaks the back of the London season, as it is said to do, the London season lives on a long time with an injured spine. It does not even become a cripple. Within a fortnight or three weeks of that event the town was as full as ever. The country cousins, provincial sportsmen, married squires, and gay parsons, who took three weeks including the great Epsom and Ascot meetings, were gone back again. But the Row, the Clubs, and Bond Street by day, and Belgravia and the Opera by night, were just as full as ever. Deloraine was there, and was one of the daily loungers over those tantalizing rails, which separate so many worshippers from their idols, a very yielding *vertugadin* of propriety, or a tiny barrier against hostilities, a railing against railing, a *lucus a non lucendo.*

Deloraine was still there; for he had never

ventured to find his way to Mrs. Ferrers. He wanted an excuse, he said to himself; and as yet he had never even seen her.

Fitzcourthope lounged by his side, in the bright sunshine, which, however a native may wish to avoid it, was by no means distasteful to the young Irishman. They looked at the beauties as they passed, and Deloraine and his companions took off their hats and kissed their hands to the women, and nodded to their male friends as they rode by.

"Now, Fitzcourthope, you shall lionise me. I've not been here these two years. Who's that?" And Deloraine pointed out a fat-fair-and-forty sort of woman on a thoroughbred hack.

"That's the wife of an ironmonger in the City, who's made his fortune by an invention for stewing turtle in its own fat. Bad sort of figure for horse exercise, but she will do it." Deloraine looked at her with wonder, but without admiration.

"And who's that fellow?" He was a highly important sort of person, on a very high stepping grey, which looked like a dray horse in miniature, with the hair off his legs.

"What, the man with the hooked nose, and the long pointed moustache? affects the French Imperial style, doesn't he? Splendid snob! And you don't know him?"

"Not I. How should I know all the distinguished foreigners in London? Some embassy?"

"Californian ambassador! Bill discounting scoundrel, that's got his pocket full of stamps at this very minute. There, didn't I tell you so? Dashed if he isn't going to do a bit of stiff for Monniless over the rails! Faith, Deloraine, what rum things these rails would say, if they could speak. It's a comfort the women can't turn them, like the tables."

"They'd be always at it, to hear what they'd got to say against one another."

"Ah! How do?" said the young nobleman again to a light, neat figure that rode by. "That's the winner of the Punchestown Chase; and here comes Cockham, the son of a man who made a large fortune on the turf. He's the biggest liar in England. Don't he look it? It would be lucky if such men carried their character in their faces."

"Your acquaintance seems to be miscellaneous. How did you know him?"

"Oh, the old man used to shave me when I first went into the Blues."

"Shave you, Fitz? Why, you've not much to shave now."

"No; but I wanted a moustache; so he used to give me a shave to make it grow. He didn't come the morning after Shapp won the Leger."

At that moment Deloraine looked through the crowd and saw a face he knew. It was no other than that of the man who had paid him at Tattersall's three weeks before.

Gilbert Ferrers was dressed very well indeed, and rode a very good hack; so was the lady who rode by his side. It was just about four years since Deloraine had seen her, then a mere girl; but there was no material alteration in Myra Gray, excepting that she had become Ferrers and slightly *embonpoint.* He felt a little disappointed that she did not look more to be pitied.

Fitzcourthope took off his hat to her; but she passed Deloraine manifestly without seeing him.

"There, Deloraine, there's an acquaintance of

yours: Mrs. Ferrers. That's the best-looking woman in the Park. I hate him. I never speak to him."

"What's the matter with him?"

"Oh, he's a regular cocktail: don't run straight; and he treats her shamefully."

"Does he? Why don't you take Lady Honoria to call on her?"

"I would, only he's such a brute; and one must know him then. Besides, Honoria's only been in town once, at the Duchess of Marigold's, and she couldn't call then."

"I don't see it. She was your father's ward. Almost like a sister."

"Honoria 'd cut a dozen sisters that bolted with such a cad as that."

Deloraine said no more, and soon afterwards walked off to his club.

It was a remarkable thing to find Ferrers and his wife together at any time. It was to-day a mere accident; but it must be admitted that for a week or two matters had gone on in Chester Street with a degree more of mutual accommodation than heretofore. Myra was not a woman to weep over imaginary wrongs; and though

she had certainly ceased to feel acutely her husband's neglect, she argued that it was impolitic to herself, as well as ungracious to him, to act with quite so much reserve. Hence an occasional ride.

She had again reconciled herself to driving in her own carriage. Since the heavy loss at Ascot, and the necessity of raising money to cover it, their household difficulties had begun rapidly to disappear. The most pressing of her husband's bills had been paid; and if he was still occasionally embarrassed for large sums, he took care not to let his wife feel or share his uneasiness. The household assumed a more comfortable appearance. The husband and wife were outwardly on good terms. Myra was eased of a great burden; and they had resumed the little dinners and amusements which their coldness had interrupted. Hence they were riding together on the day in question.

Affection, when once great and once forfeited, cannot be restored. These are either the words or the sentiment of a clever commentator on Mr. Tytler's account of Mary Queen of Scots and Darnley. It sounds like an axiom. It has

a truthful ring about it; and was true of her. But it is not universally true, and would not have been true of Myra Ferrers under conditions which, however, never existed. A woman upon whom the contrition and radical change of her first love makes no impression, is a bad woman,—hard, unfeminine, a female Rodomanthus, unfitted for earth. If Gilbert Ferrers could have put sweet for bitter, could have cleared up her doubts as he had cleared up some of his debts, could have given her his affections again, as he restored to her his countenance, time would have softened asperities, and Myra would have replaced her idol. She would have forgotten the cracks and the faults, and have cered over the flaws with a new affection, taking care that it should never be broken in the same place again.

But Ferrers gave her no chance. He was and continued to be, to all intents and purposes, selfish, profligate, unreclaimed. And he had a mystery, which is always trying to a woman, one of whose few weaknesses is curiosity.

Where did he get his money from? He appeared to be indifferent as usual on the score

of expense, and yet without settled occupation or fortune. In the early days of their marriage Myra had longed for a country home. She would like to have seen Gilbert a country gentleman, a sportsman, a member of Parliament; but if the ambition remained, there was another route to its accomplishment. But he had told her he could not live out of London. All his pursuits were metropolitan, his gains were urban; he had no country tastes, and that he must make money in the City, convert the stones to bread.

That was in the days of a pretended confidence; now, and soon afterwards, there was none. There was wonder at his resources, whispers of enemies, servile admiration of friends, and a great and growing dislike of his superiors.

"But where does he get the money? three hundred and eighty to Sheward!"

"Devilish odd. I don't know; but Sivewright—only don't mention my name—says he's the real proprietor of a private hell in Jermyn Street. I should have cut him long ago but for his wife."

"Beautiful!—the best of the master I've seen: couldn't have cost less than a thousand. And what taste he has too!" Of course Ferrers is within earshot.

"How in the world your pretty friend, Mrs. Ferrers, who is a lady, could have married such a purse-proud snob I don't know." And so they went on.

But still nobody did know how he got his money; the more so, as things in the City were known not to be going very well with him just now.

About this time Lady Mary Thorncliffe was "at home," which means that your house is put in possession of three hundred people, of whom two-thirds are comparative strangers to you, and your intimate friends only come for the purpose of shaking hands and passing on to somebody else, of whom they know nothing. "At home!" If you had to explain this expression, or to give an illustration of it to a South Sea Islander, he would be justified in breaking through the usual courtesy imputed to savages by staring. Savages! I beg pardon. They have a queen, a king consort, hats and feathers, epaulettes on

state occasions, and are about being appraised in the Australian slave market by some sharp-set American skippers. This looks like civilisation.

But Lady Mary Thorncliffe lived according to the light afforded her; and she had an "at home," with two hundred people on her staircase, laughing, flirting, and eating ices, and one hundred dancing inside of the room. These persons were never inconvenienced, excepting when a fat dowager would go up or downstairs in search of some laughing daughter, too fond of detrimentals in general or some one in particular, who, lying *perdue* in some quiet corner, perhaps thought on a London landing-place, with Horatian simplicity, that of all places that was the place she loved.

> "Ille terrarum mihi præter omnes
> Angulus ridet."

Myra Ferrers was in the room, and dancing; and immediately behind her the crowd surged in and out of the doorway, as some distinguished arrival was announced.

"Mrs. Ferrers," said a rather low voice near

her, as if afraid of intrusion, which it was, seeing that Mrs. Ferrers was usually *très recherchée* when her husband was not by. "Mrs. Ferrers, you will almost have forgotten me;" for she turned at once, and did not at first, in the crowd, quite collect herself sufficiently to see who it was that had spoken.

"Oh! no, that's impossible, Mr. Deloraine; though it seems a long time indeed since we met." And then, remembering at once the circumstances, her face was covered with blushes, as she extended to him her hand. She was soon disengaged, and then Deloraine claimed her for a dance.

Their conversation was constrained. It was impossible to talk, even of Ireland, without reminiscences which both shared; and the thread of which one at least would have been happy never to have broken. After a time, however, this feeling of *gêne* wore off. Deloraine was a person so thoroughly considerate, and so completely a man of the world, that it was difficult not to feel at one's ease with him. It must be remembered, too, that Myra's prepossessions were all in his favour, and that he had never

pretended to shake off his admiration for her.

At last, she ventured to say to him—"You have never called upon me since my marriage, Mr. Deloraine. Did you think your ward was so unruly, that you were glad to give up all charge of her at once?"

"I have never been in London since the circumstances to which you allude."

"Then you should have come on purpose, if only to thank me for the trouble I have saved you by transferring all anxiety to Mr. Ferrers. You have not made his acquaintance yet." And so they became more cheerful, as their conversation varied, and regarded one another as old friends before they separated. "You were not at Ascot, Mr. Deloraine?"

Then Ferrers, thought he, has not mentioned his bet with me, at all events.

"Yes, I was. You know racing is a weakness of mine. I think, though I hardly saw him for a moment, I did make Mr. Ferrers' acquaintance there."

"Possibly; for he had a house there for the week."

"And you?" said Deloraine, looking his query as to her absence.

"I! Oh! I care nothing about now racing—besides, Mr. Ferrers' was only a bachelor party. We shall see you to lunch then to-morrow, though I cannot promise that he will be at home. He is so busy and uncertain."

"I think I saw him with you in the Row."

"Yes; riding. I'm fond of riding still, you see." Myra was glad he had seen her husband with her, and that he at least had no suspicion of the evanescent dream for which she had risked and lost so much. From that evening they became intimate, and Deloraine was a constant visitor at the house.

Deloraine saw Gilbert Ferrers of course, and did not like him. With all his good looks and plausible manners there was an insufferable pretension, mixed with a nervous anxiety always to appear at his best. Nothing is so fatal to a man's reputation with his own sex. Women are suspicious, but not in the same way as men. They seldom suspect that the tongue that is smooth to them can be a very sword. Men invariably do so; and, though a

man loves to be flattered by a woman, he requires skilful blandishment from his own sex to make it palatable.

To say the truth, Deloraine had other motives for watching Ferrers.

It is not true to allow the reader to believe that he was in love with Myra. Still less so to let him imagine that she had given him any encouragement. The best part of his affection for her in her childhood survived, the wreck of what she might have carried into port a noble vessel. But no man who has felt as he, is ever proof against the increasing fascinations of a woman, who appeals to him later in life on the score of pity. With all he knew and conjectured of the antecedents of Gilbert Ferrers, he felt a protecting happiness in being near her, and in watching over her. We all love more or less what we feel is dependent upon us. Aristotle declares a parent's love to spring from the sentiment of his creation; but it is no less so than from the necessity of continued protection. And when once that cord is snapped by the circumstances of society, it is not certain that the remnant of our feelings is much more than the habit of loving.

In pursuance of this feeling, Deloraine had sought an interview with the old banker, to whom he had transmitted the transaction of Myra's pecuniary affairs, and from whose hands they had passed by the authority she had so liberally, but unwisely, bestowed upon Ferrers.

"In confidence, then, Mr. Blunt, as the representative of Mrs. Ferrers' first and last protector, I ask you for any information you can give me on the affairs of Mr. Ferrers." And Deloraine, not strictly a man of business, did not think he was asking too much. "Am I trespassing on the confidence which exists between you?"

"No, no! not exactly that. Your position is somewhat peculiar. It is our duty to our clients to make no disclosures; but, in reality, Mrs. Ferrers has long ceased to honour us with her confidence." And Mr. Blunt looked as if it was a sore subject.

"But you have still some of her securities, her investments; and if——"

"Indeed, my dear sir, you labour under a great error. By her orders all have been surrendered to Mr. Ferrers, and——" Here the old gentleman paused.

"The world speaks mysteriously of Mr. Ferrers and his resources."

"The world is often mistaken. His expenses are great, and his speculations are doubtless on a very extensive scale; but still——Well, we have felt it desirable to withdraw from all participation in them."

"But his moral life, Mr. Blunt; his way of living, his long absences——"

"Ah! now, Mr. Deloraine, you touch on a delicate point. The world is possibly a better judge of these things. Beyond the necessities of business, my own personal sentiments have always prevented the firm entering upon such discussions." And the little hypocrite looked as if the remotest mention of such things was calculated to do irreparable injury to the spotless fame of the senior partner in Blunt and Co.

"But his schemes, his undertakings, as a man of business——"

"Are such as did not command our approbation, and we withdrew;" he might have added, after turning the information to considerable advantage.

"And it is for my late ward's sake that I make these inquiries."

"Mr. Deloraine, when a man begins life nobody knows how, as a banker's clerk, and by his talents raises himself to a respectable position only—you understand me as speaking of income—when he emerges, suddenly emerges, by a fortunate marriage, and in a very short space of time manages to do far more than we, sir—we, an old-established firm, have done by prudent management and integrity for many years; when he surrounds himself with men not remarkable for foresight, but with a blind confidence in himself—West-end men, sir, loungers, clubmen, retired Indians—men who have a desire to live beyond their legitimate means, to be great men upon little incomes, who are afraid to inquire, and incapable of commercial investigation; when he drives the finest carriages, and rides the finest horses in London—of course I speak in the strictest confidence—why, sir, I think that man, without wishing to be uncharitable or unchristian-like, may be a very fair object of—of doubt; indeed, I may say of very great suspicion."

It was a long speech for Mr. Blunt, who was rather short-winded; but while looking much distressed at the necessity of speaking out, he chuckled at the spoke he had put into the wheel of his late confidential clerk, and the evident effect he had produced on the mind of Deloraine.

That gentleman shortly after took his leave, more impressed than ever with the possibility of Myra standing in need of a friend; and that at no great distance of time.

CHAPTER XII.

AND COMES RATHER UNEXPECTEDLY ON THE HUNTED FOX.

THE absence of Ferrers from his home had ceased to be remarkable to his household, or to his wife. If he appeared at breakfast Myra was there to make it for him; and there are few pleasanter things in the world than a good breakfast, and such a woman as Myra Ferrers to look at during its enjoyment. It was unfortunately not seldom that Ferrers thought differently. He dined at the club, or with a friend on business, having given that general order that he is not to be waited for, which implies such intense indifference to home. Business out of town had long

been made an excuse for persistent absences of some days together, and now acquiesced in by Myra.

How little had Myra thought that in two short years her ideal of home would have been so ruthlessly defaced. You think her castle-building may have carried her away? Surely her standard, to judge by her experience, could not have been a very exaggerated one of domesticity. But she might have pictured to herself one kind and handsome face to have looked at her from the other side of the hearth, to have shared her hopes if she had them, her cares when they came; a companion if not a guide, a playmate if not a helpmate; something to look at she had bargained for, that would smile with her when she smiled; for she never thought of weeping, with Gilbert Ferrers by her side. And if she ever looked further into futurity, and dreamed that her and her husband's fireside might be the rallying-point of many affections, the ultimate end of her own and his ambition, the pang of hopeless infruition made the rest of her disappointment only the harder to bear.

During one of these absences from home, we

must carry the reader away from London to that cottage at the foot of an abrupt Sussex hill, near Hastings.

The cottage was everything that could be desired in the way of position and arrangement. It was but a cottage. Its rooms were small, its gardens unpretending, its furniture cottage-like in tone, but rich in quality. A few cabinet pictures adorned the walls, and couches and *chaises-longues* gave it the comforts of a house.

There was a closeness, a mystery, a snugness about the whole which was somewhat analogous to deeds done in the dark. Justly or unjustly they have never borne the best of characters, either the deeds or the cottages; and in the present case, as generally, public opinion was right.

The day was sharp and cold, but the sun bright, and the sea, which was visible from the breakfast-room windows, was calm, with here and there a sail to be seen sluggishly moving. The breakfast-table was in that sort of disorder which immediately precedes clearing away. One arm-chair, with its back to a conservatory opening from the room, contained Gilbert Fer-

rers, almost lying at full length, with a cigar in his mouth and a newspaper in his hand. Another, of equally recumbent fashion, contained a lady in full contrast with the other, as regards attitude at least. Mathilde, or Mrs. Bransome, as she was here called, sat upright, resting her elbows on the arms of the chair, and clasping her hands together with considerable energy. Mathilde was not a woman to put any restraint on her appearance before Gilbert Ferrers now, though we have seen that she could dissimulate with a purpose to answer.

"I tell you I will not stop here longer!" said she, her eyes flashing, or rather with that curious glare which in light eyes corresponds with the flash for dark ones. It is more sensibly disagreeable to look at, and not so handsome.

"Mathilde, you do not know what you are talking about;" and in saying so, Gilbert Ferrers retained his position.

"No, I don't understand; but I will discover. Why should I be thus compromised?"

"And where will you go for your information?" said he.

"To London—to your numerous offices—to the City, where you are known."

"Why not to Mrs. Ferrers at once?" and he pretended to read.

"Well, to Mrs. Ferrers—to Myra Ferrers, if you will. Why not?"

"I'll tell you why;" and here he, too, sat upright. "Because you would cut from under your own feet your only hope of living here."

"Why should I want to live here imprisoned and alone? the tool of schemes which I am never allowed to comprehend——"

"You share the profits of them."

"I ought to owe what I have to your generosity—no, to your justice. It is a small return for everything I had to give." And here the glare of her eyes turned to moisture; they filled with tears, and it was easy to mark the change which had taken place in Mathilde in the last two years. Her face had grown thinner, there was a bright, red spot on the once pale cheek, and a more marked and worn expression about her handsome mouth and teeth and defined under jaw.

"And you wish to hazard it all by your impatience?"

"If it were a palace, I should hate it as I now live. You have something to conceal from me. What is it?"

"My concealments are the other way. I wish to protect you—conceal, if you like—from the consequences of imprudence. You are like all women, curious and inconsiderate."

"Curiosity was Eve's fault; want of consideration for myself has been mine; but for you never. You know you speak falsely. Might I not have married you myself but for my consideration? Answer me that." And Mathilde's face grew brighter and her eyes stranger.

"You know why you did not. It was an economical arrangement."

"It was because I would not drag you down with me, or stand in the way of your advancement. You married Myra Gray, and tired of her in a month, before you had spent the money for which you sold yourself, and victimised me and her."

"And now you are ambitious that all the world should know it."

"And why not?" and here Mathilde rose, and as she did so her massive auburn hair fell in

heavy locks around her to her waist. She was dressed in a handsome satin dressing-gown, looped with golden cords and tassels. Her feet were daintily shod with silk embroidered slippers, and a quantity of rich lace floated over her neck and throat, open in front, which showed that her lover had not been sparing in his adornment of her person. She was a worn, but still a beautiful, woman.

"You are mad, Mathilde!" and Ferrers looked as if he meant it.

"I sometimes think so, or that I shall be."

"I tell you that your intolerance will ruin yourself and me. You want to know my schemes. Listen. I live well, but precariously, I admit: you share both. My business is not my own; I have associates, whose interests are to be considered. It is desirable that we part for a time. I have been honest with you; for I might have left you without warning. You have aided us with the German correspondence, which you alone could conduct for us in safety; and you must continue to do so. You must not follow me to London; for if you cross the path of my

wife, everything will be lost. Now do you understand?"

Mathilde did not answer.

"My wife's suspicions have been aroused—by what circumstances I know not. A public scandal would set investigation on foot, and once begun, would end in the ruin of us all. She has nothing more to give, but I have plenty more to lose. While I live and prosper, you shall never want; but once move, and you must return to that hard, work-a-day world which you hate so much, and which is never lenient to those who have once set its conventional proprieties at defiance. That they are conventional you and I know well enough, Mathilde. The world consists of knaves and fools: but the knaves form a very large majority; and so we are obliged at length to quarrel for the spoil among ourselves." Saying which, Gilbert Ferrers took himself and his cigar into the sunshine, leaving Mathilde, with the tears running down her cheeks, and her head sunk upon her bosom, in profound dejection.

How much of what Gilbert Ferrers had said was true? It was undoubtedly true that he was

engaged in a most precarious pursuit. The leading object of his life had been wealth—not for accumulation, but for expenditure. He had fostered it, and achieved his object without the slightest reference to right or wrong. He had deceived his wife, swindled every one who was unwise enough to trust him, and ignorant enough not to look after their own affairs. He had done all this under the protection of legitimate business. He was as bad as some others, but not as wise, for he had made no marriage settlement. His proposed generosity to Mathilde was moonshine: he was beginning to weary of her vagaries, and having no longer a common confidence, she had ceased to amuse him as formerly, for his was a highly practical mind. His reputation was everything to the success of his schemes, so that he would have preferred anything to a public scandal, and he dreaded investigation above all things.

There was a good reason for this. Seeing the end of his City designs as a manager, director, or anything else; knowing that his mines were flooded or exhausted, his railways insolvent, his interest paid out of capital, and his West-end

shareholders tired of being called upon, he had grown desperate. He had joined his friend, Mr. Percy Hardman, and some others in uttering forged bills of exchange; he had become, in the language of that gentleman, "one of us." Mathilde had been useful to him, and if she received some share of the plunder, she ran some share of the risk.

But we must devote a page or two to the interests of Mathilde von Robeck. From the earliest days in which we made acquaintance with her, she had devoted herself to the task of securing the affections of Gilbert Ferrers. An assumed indifference on his part, more congenial to his manner than to his character, had piqued her vanity, a strong point in a woman of very strong points, and she set herself to win him. The pursuit, undertaken as a matter of pride, and only intended to be thrown up or followed out as her own interests dictated, became all-absorbing. In setting her trap she caught herself; and as she was incapable of doing things by halves, she developed a violent passion. Innoculation had not saved her from taking the disease naturally and most violently.

That Ferrers should not have availed himself of his power and position was an impossibility in a man so devoid of generous sentiments or moral restraint: it would have been an improbability in a wiser and a better man. But not only were his passions appealed to by this companionship, but his avarice. Mathilde became useful, almost necessary, to him in numerous occupations by which he began to earn a livelihood. She was a good French and German scholar, of which he knew nothing, and of which he availed himself with publishers, literary men, and foreign correspondents, to increase his income. No lien could have been more unostentatiously close between husband and wife than that between Mathilde and Ferrers.

Her absence in Germany and his own employment in London were dictated only by motives of prudence. It was true on her part that she might have become his wife; but what cared she for such ties if she could only have been assured of his affection. She argued, not unjustly perhaps, that a poor wife, who dragged him down to her own level, would have become distasteful to him; while the strongest claim

she could have upon him would be the fact of having given him wealth and position by the sacrifice of herself. Such an opportunity offered itself in Myra Gray. We have seen how she availed herself of it.

When he sent for her to England after his marriage, secrecy, inviolable secrecy, became necessary to both of them; and the same bond of mutual utility continued to unite them. How ungrudgingly she had given that service; how far she had surpassed the ordinary run of women in devotion to an unhallowed love. Who can say what, under changed circumstances, Mathilde von Robeck might have become? For him—selfish, profligate, inconstant—we have not a word to say; he would have wrecked the noblest vessel to share in the plunder; he would have broken down the grandest throne as a footstool to reach the most ignoble object. Two-thirds of his wealth had been earned by her industry; two-thirds of his dirtiest work had been done by her hands and brains.

And now she was going mad. What Gilbert Ferrers had said in ridicule was really likely to be the case. Solitude broken by uncertain

intervals, suspicion, anxiety, the triumph of evil passions, and an ignorance of what would happen to her, had unsettled her mind. She was by turns, as we have seen her, wrought upon by fits of obstinate self-will, or despondent gloom.

Was Ferrers a man to see this, or, seeing it, to soothe it? Where was he to find companionship for her, but by sending her abroad; and would he do that while she could minister to his pleasures or to his interests? Would he clear up her suspicions, allay her anxiety, or control her passions by the moderation of his own? It was not in his power, had it been his inclination, to do so. Would he make her his confidante, and give her the comfort of sharing his danger, unless by doing so he could avert it? Not he, indeed.

Henry Deloraine had forgotten his good resolutions about Ireland, and was still in London. He may be pardoned for neglecting, but not for ignoring the gentlemen who had arranged to shoot him. Tim Doolan, however, was gone, and the unaccountable absence of the assassin himself kept them quiet, and produced a better

state of things. One thing in London he found conspicuous by its absence—his hunting; and he therefore occasionally ran down into the Midland Counties for a day's amusement.

It was now the other side of Christmas, which expression seems always to have been understood as viewing that season of severity and bills from some point on the November side of the year. There is no retrospect in time, I presume. Gone, it is gone, though ever present with us. It surrounds us, and yet we never know whether we shall grasp it any more. Time flies, and yet we regulate its pace. To the fast man it goes slowly; to the slow, it ever seems to be running away.

Deloraine had been hunting a few days, and had not read his papers very lately. So as he got into the train at Rugby, and there was nothing beyond that faint glimmer by which all attempts to read prove futile, he gave himself up to thought. Peter and his horses came before him, but he dismissed them briefly enough. One had what is known among hunting men as a leg; but he had faded, and the leg gone down before he got to Weedon. He did not trouble

himself about the Irish Church in those days, and of the Land Tenure he had washed his hands for the present. So when they had once more started, he settled himself in his corner and conjured up the pleasantest vision he could conceive.

That was a woman, undoubtedly. And of all women, to Deloraine's mind, there was still none equal to Myra Ferrers.

He got to Wolverton without molestation. He had found time to run over in his mind's-eye his own self-restraint in limiting his visits in Chester Street, the inevitable crash which he was now assured must attend the speculations of Ferrers and his companions, and the bitter collapse of Myra's happiness whenever that crash should come. He cursed Mr. Gilbert Ferrers by bell and book, and gratified himself by the suggestion, that Myra's affection or respect for her husband would not be put to any hard trial, come what would. He was building a castle for himself, from which Mr. Gilbert Ferrers had been taken, by a merciful Providence (merciful to him, Deloraine), to another world, and in which Myra was reigning whole

and sole chatelaine. He was in a half-dreamy state, and about to constitute himself the accepted lover of the lady, when the door opened, and a draught of cold air preceded a fat farmer, who had been down to Tring market, and was going home again by the late train. He had been dining heartily on something and onions, and had topped it all up with copious libations of water and something else.

The cold woke up Deloraine, and the jolly old farmer seeing a gentleman stretching himself in the corner, broke in upon him with a little cheerful conversation.

"See the papers this morning, sur?" said old Tops, with a grunt.

"No," said Deloraine, who was always good tempered enough to talk in a train, which I am not; "anything particular?"

"More o' they failures. Now, I s'pose if you and I was to go helpin' ourselves to our neighbours' purses, they'd call us d——d ugly names."

"It's seldom in this world that things are called by their right names."

"May be so; but they've ruined a neighbour

o' mine, and I do think the failures in the City's worse nor the failure o' turmots wi' us."

"It comes from over speculation," said Deloraine. "I am afraid your friend began dabbling in what he didn't understand."

"Very like; but there's one Muster Ferrers, as the papers says is the biggest rogue o' the lot. He's got clean off wi' the money, and half the country's ruined."

"Mister Ferrers!" said Deloraine, waking up. "Where did you see that?"

"I' the *Toimes;*" and the farmer dived into his big pockets, and pulled out the paper of that day. "Mayhap he may be an acquaintance o' yours. I hopes not, wi' all my heart. But if he be, it won't prevent his being the d——dest rascal of a very bad lot." Having delivered which opinion somewhat oracularly, he presented Deloraine with the *Times.* "Wussner, Turnabout, and Barney."

Deloraine availed himself of the little light that the North-Western afforded him, and read of the panic that had ensued upon the disappearance of the chairman, Gilbert Ferrers, Esq., and the break-up of the Slaughterton Branch;

the sudden depression of the Paris and London Junction; and the utter extinction of the Aluminium Mining Company, which was now known to have been inundated months back. There was a long list of miserable bankrupts, and supposed failures in consequence of these defalcations. Half Baker Street was ruined; calls for shares were not replied to; languid swells talked of being hard up with real feeling; Blunt and Co. were supposed to be hard hit; and every skulking vagabond who had not paid his bills for the last three years put his inability upon the monetary crisis.

The intelligence produced an effect upon Deloraine, as might have been expected.

"Disappeared!" said he to himself. "That's a complication I hardly bargained for. Poor Myra! What is to be done? Has she any friends in town? The Thorncliffes, or the Penruddocks, or any of his City friends, who will be grateful to him for not including them in the list of his victims."

But something more remarkable remained behind. A supposition, in another part of the paper, pretended to account for the sudden

disappearance of the director and chairman in question. An attack upon a nest of forgers of foreign bills by the police had brought to light a long list of felonious rascalities. Four had been arrested, with some implements and instruments; one had effected a daring escape; and a foreign lady, not in the hands of the police, was said to be implicated. With this lady close relations were said to have existed for some time past on the part of Gilbert Ferrers, and he was announced as the missing felon. Was it possible? In reviewing the character and antecedents of that person, Henry Deloraine was compelled to admit its probability. His life previously had been vicious; he had been mysteriously connected with a lady bearing a foreign name; and he had been spending in personal extravagances and speculation very large sums of money, which far exceeded his wife's small fortune. Poor Myra!

Deloraine sat at breakfast the following morning. The sun shone brightly into his rooms as it appeared to come gradually round from the east to the south, and gave a colour to his sombre reflections. Perhaps matters might not

be so bad as represented. Other gentlemen in such a city as London, notwithstanding its odour of English respectability, might have relations with foreign ladies; and it was known that Gilbert Ferrers was not the only person, director or chairman of half a dozen companies, who had been living for years upon what his friends called his wits, and the wits his "want of principle." Under any circumstances, the bare fact of his ruin and disappearance was bad enough; but the bright sun and his cigar made him hope that the extreme bounds of right and wrong—that is, of acknowledged guilt and possible misfortune—might not have been crossed by Myra's husband. For in that light only Deloraine regarded him. Gilbert Ferrers was to him an unmitigated scoundrel, he had no doubt: his hand was against everybody, in everybody's pocket; but as Myra's husband a certain amount of reflected interest attached itself to him, and he was, in the absence of direct proof, not so much worse than his fellows.

"Is there nobody," said he to himself, "but this arch-speculator who is living upon widows and orphans, the hard earnings of men who had

grown grey with toil in service, ex-colonists, struggling fathers of large families? Have no bankers ever laughed at the victims they have ruined? Have no railway kings their carriages and houses and opera-boxes, the proceeds of their wives' settlements, while their dupes are peopling workhouses, or beginning life again at the wrong end? Is there only this one unrighteous on whom 'the tower of Siloam has fallen?' Has society turned its back upon the ready-witted bankrupt, because he is still giving great dinners and clothed in purple, while his creditors are pining on a third dividend of sixpence in the pound? Certainly not," says he again, blowing out a cloud of contemplative tobacco, as he catches sight of the spanking horses of Mr. Tophet, the ex-contractor, manager, shareholder of the Go-on-end line, whose schedule presented a total of liabilities of six millions, and who is now living in dignified retirement, a ruined national benefactor, on fifteen thousand a year. Dives did not go to the wrong place because he was rich, but because he made a bad use of his wealth, and watched poor Lazarus starve, from whom he

had *not* stolen it. But is not this Mrs. Tophet's property? Shall I make reparation with what costs me nothing? "Well, then," and this was the conclusion of these premises, "if he has not committed the forgery, he's no worse than some others, and may come to the surface again. He has only been found out. It is very wrong, but not so bad as it might be. To be found out is not, under all circumstances, a felony."

Then what ought Deloraine to do? Deloraine argued with himself the question of going to call upon Myra Ferrers; of offering her aid in her troubles, of being of service to her pecuniarily or otherwise. How gladly he would have done so! And he almost rejoiced in her misfortunes which gave him the opportunity.

But there was about Deloraine a most un-Irish characteristic. He had a certain delicate consciousness, which made him speak the truth to himself—a person to whom it ought always to be told. It is bad policy not to tell it there upon all occasions. He knew how very fond he had become of Myra Ferrers. He saw, too, that, with all her self-respect and honesty, she had none left for her husband. He knew that her

affection—which, thank heaven for us poor men! lives after respect is dead—had been worn away by worse than cruelty; by systematic indifference to her feelings, her tastes, amusements, and associates, and by a well-founded suspicion of outrage on her honour and susceptibility. Deloraine was not conceited; but he saw this, and could not help feeling that her sentiments for himself were in a position to assume a warmer form than mere friendship. How many men would have been flattered by it? How many would have thought it right to put a restraint on their own satisfaction, to have sacrificed to a high sense of duty their own vanity or momentary gratification? With no ill intent in the pursuit of their Platonism, it is not every man that would have thought first of the woman he loved and then of himself, and withdrawn from the possibility of a compromise which could have affected nobody but her.

This was what Deloraine was about to do. He would see Myra no more, excepting as the chances of society might offer. He knew his own motives, but he knew the world; and it should have no opportunity of injuring, even in

thought, the woman who stood highest in it in his estimation. So he at once began turning over in his mind some means of communication by lawyers or men of business, some method of offering or affording the assistance of which he believed her to stand in need, and for which he believed himself to be the very last person to whom Mrs. Ferrers would apply.

He had got thus far when a knock at the door disturbed his reverie, and Mr. Thorncliffe, the husband of Myra's acquaintance, Lady Mary, stood before him. It was an early call, and a curious coincidence; for Deloraine was not far wrong in his conclusion as to the subject of the visit.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN EMPTY HOUSE IN CHESTER STREET.

WOMEN'S thoughts are not as our thoughts. They are more pure, more good, and they therefore arrive by a sort of instinct at what is right by a quicker and surer road than by our subtle philosophy. A really true, honest woman has no fears in such a case as the present. She has no appreciation of the doubts and suspicions which naturally and properly beset a man of the world, if he be a just one. This is peculiarly the case with young and innocent women; and it was Myra's case, for it was on her account that Mr. Thorncliffe had made his call.

All business between gentlemen, on life or

death, begins with the amenities of society. Time is not quite so valuable to them, or, at least, they have never been accustomed to put a money value on it of six and eightpence a minute, and the present case was no exception to the rule. So Mr. Thorncliffe mentioned the sun, the earliness of the spring, the badness of the season in the matter of scent in his own county, and then fell to the business in hand.

"A very sad business," said Mr. Thorncliffe.

"It is indeed. And now the question is, what is to be done?"

"I suppose you are acquainted with Mrs. Ferrers' affairs; and it is, in fact, in consequence of Lady Mary's advice that I came down here to-day."

Mr. Thorncliffe was heir to a dukedom, and proud of it. He was proud of being a county member. He was proud of being one of the very best sportsmen in ——shire; but he was prouder of being the husband of such a woman as Lady Mary than of all the rest put together. So he quoted her pretty freely; in fact, like many more of us, whenever his own judgment was at fault.

"Ah!" replied Deloraine. "Did Lady Mary think that I——?" Here he stopped.

"She thinks that you feel a peculiar interest in Mrs. Ferrers."

"So I do. I've known her a long time. Her guardian was my intimate friend, and left me the control of her affairs to a certain extent."

"Just so. Then you have——"

"Paid over every sixpence to the hands of Blunt and Co. for investment in government securities."

"So, then, she, at all events, will not be ruined."

"I believe she gave, with a generosity not uncommon in women, every shilling to her worthless husband."

"You have reason to think that? Then she will have nothing; for she has not seen him this fortnight or more, and has no idea at the present moment what has become of him."

"Have you seen her?" inquired Deloraine, somewhat jealously.

"Oh, dear no. She has seen nobody but Lady Mary, who has latterly been much with her. You see she's a woman—Lady Mary, I

mean—of great discernment; and has always had a feeling of kindness for Mrs. Ferrers. Since her husband has been so much engaged in these cursed speculations we have seen a great deal of her. I couldn't stand that fellow, Deloraine; with his high art and insufferable affectation."

"And has Lady Mary given her any advice?"

"Advice! Well, yes—I should say so. And deuced good advice too."

"Do you know what? Poor soul! she stands in need of a friend." This was said aside.

"Yes, I know. She told her to put her house and furniture into the hands of an agent at once. For, strange to say, it is her own; that is, the lease. In a fit of generosity he gave it to her."

"Out of her own money. Never mind, it's lucky, as it happens."

"And she offered her the cottage at the Isle of Wight. You see, we shall not want it at present; and two of the servants are there. She wishes to leave town."

"There ought to have been more Lady Marys in the world, Thorncliffe. Say how much I feel —that is—how kind and considerate."

"To tell you the truth, I almost forgot the special reason I had for coming here. Mrs. Ferrers said there was only one person to whom she would like to apply for advice in her difficulty; and that was yourself."

"Did she?" And Deloraine's whole appearance for a moment lighted up, and as quickly subsided into thoughtfulness. "But what could I do?"

"Go and see. Perhaps if you talked to her she may be persuaded to take the cottage. It's heartily at her service."

"Thanks, thanks, a thousand times. Then you think that I ought to go and see her?" For he was still a little suspicious of his own motives.

"Of course you ought. Have you seen the paper this morning?"

"Not yet. I was late. And I've not been to the club, as you see."

It was unfortunate that he had not seen the papers, as it might have saved him the shock to his good-natured doubts, and which was rudely administered a few minutes later. Mr. Thorncliffe, having finished what he had to say, and at length delivered the message, which Lady

Mary had judiciously forwarded, as the only important part of the communication, rose to go.

"Then I hope we shall hear from you when you've seen Mrs. Ferrers. And if Lady Mary can be of the slightest service you will let us know. I must be off to the House."

A few minutes later Deloraine had exchanged his dressing-gown for a coat, and sallied forth, if not in better spirits, in a more equable form of mind, as to his own share in the transaction. Had she not summoned him? Should he not go? Of course; and give her the very best help, and the very best and most disinterested advice in the world. He was glad she had something to fall back upon—the lease, probably a short one, of her house, and her furniture. Good pictures he had heard, but, being no judge, he could not tell. He wondered whether the horses and carriages were included. He almost counted the jewels he had seen her wear, and the very rings upon her fingers. These must be her own. Two or three hundred a year was not much, even in a country town. And then when the lease fell in! What to do? However, sufficient unto the day. After which he devised a

little scheme in his own head (which, of course, would come to nothing) of adding from his own abundance, by a circuitous route which she should never suspect, a sufficiency for comfort, and something more.

Having settled this, with a very true conviction that she would be far happier without her husband than with him, and a tolerably sincere wish that they might hear of his death within a twelvemonth, he turned the corner of Pall Mall, walked up St. James's Street, and entered upon Piccadilly.

Opposite Devonshire House he was run into by a man in a hurry; a short, stout, broad-shouldered gentleman, scrupulously clean and neat in person; a gentleman undoubtedly, but not a man of fashion. They both began to apologise, and both stopped short in their apologies, as they recognised mutually an acquaintance.

"Weyland! Bless me, you seem in a hurry."

"Ha, ha! Well, I am, Mr. Deloraine; and my terminus has met me half way. I was going into Pall Mall to find you." Saying which the little man bowed.

"I'm glad to have saved you the trouble of finding me out."

"But I shouldn't have found you at all, Mr. Deloraine. Ha, ha!" Mr. Weyland was one of those men whose exuberance of spirits—a well-to-do man was Mr. Weyland—would have engendered an involuntary chuckle in the Burial Service itself.

"And now you have found me, Weyland, what is it?"

"I want five or ten minutes," said the lawyer.

"I'm thankful for small mercies. I'm glad it's not five or ten pounds. Turn round and walk along Piccadilly with me, Weyland, for I'm in a hurry just now. We must talk going."

"You know Mrs. Ferrers?"

"I do; and very sorry I am for her. By the way, you've been employed in some of her business, I think?"

"Ha! ha! yes, poor dear lady. In nothing that could do her any good; only to raise money for that vagabond husband of hers. Ha! ha! Excuse me, Mr. Deloraine, but that's my way of speaking of him."

"A very proper way of speaking of him, from

all I hear. But what were you going to tell me?" And Deloraine, finding what the subject of the communication was to be, became serious enough in a moment. He almost resented as an impertinence Weyland's involuntary ha! ha!

"That I had had a letter from that lady three days ago, in which she begged me to consult you on any pecuniary matters connected with her or her husband's estate," said Weyland, not laughing so heartily as might have been expected.

"Well?" And Deloraine waited patiently.

"Well! you see her property is all gone."

"Then there's nothing to consult about," said Deloraine, impatiently, not so much pleased at having to share his privileges even with the family lawyer.

"Excepting the lease of the house—seven, fourteen, or twenty-one—and the furniture and pictures—new and good. Ha! ha! new and good."

"And what's that worth."

"My dear sir, who's to say?"

"Christy and Manson, I should think. But that's not what you wanted to say."

"No, no. Ha! ha! Christy and Manson. What I want you to do is to see Mrs. Ferrers."

"See Mrs. Ferrers! you think I ought to?"

"I do, indeed I do. It would be of the greatest service if you can persuade her not to make ducks and drakes of this little remnant——"

"It's not a remnant. He never had a shilling," interposed Deloraine.

"Whatever it is, she wants to squander this like the rest."

"Squander it! in what way, Weyland? I don't understand."

"No; and you'll never guess. In paying it into the Bankruptcy Court for the benefit of the —the—people who have lost their money—the shareholders. Why it will be swallowed up in expenses, and benefit nobody. Now it might do her some good, you know."

"That's another way to look at it from hers, certainly. But, you see, I can't persuade her; it's a matter of feeling."

"Undoubtedly. Ha! ha! quite a matter of feeling," replied Weyland, not understanding the word exactly; "romantic; a bit of absurd

sentimentalism. Women—excuse me, Mr. Deloraine, ha! ha!—are so very irrational in these matters. Now I——"

"Yes; I can believe there's a wide difference between a lawyer's view of the question and that taken by Mrs. Ferrers. But what am I to do? Why is it I?"

"Because she'll listen to you. She writes that she would like you to be applied to in any case that may arise in this unhappy business. Now will you talk to her, Mr. Deloraine? Say it's suicidal; cutting her own throat to no purpose."

"Yes; that's what I'm to say, is it?" and Deloraine almost laughed himself.

"Undoubtedly."

"But she won't listen to me."

"Then she won't listen to anybody. She always speaks of your advice and kindness, and your friendship for the late Lord Fitzcourthope."

"Speaks about it, does she; to whom?" said Deloraine, looking quite pleased.

"To who? ha! ha! why—a—a—to—me, to be sure; writes about it, that is. But if you

won't persuade her, why she'll be a beggar, that's all."

Deloraine didn't answer immediately. Then he said, "What's become of him?"

"Nobody knows—he's gone—but it's a felony. The police are after him. You've heard all about it, I suppose. I think there's no doubt about the forgery, though, of course, he's innocent until he's found guilty. First catch your hare, ha! ha! Mr. Deloraine; but you'll see Mrs. Ferrers. You'll find her very low—very low—but quite calm and quiet."

Deloraine pursued his way to Chester Street. He pondered many things in his mind. But he was not like Horace in the Via Sacra, "nescio quid meditans," for he knew remarkably well the subject of his thoughts. Myra Gray occupied the foreground of the picture; her husband and his rascalities the middle distance; in the background were heavy clouds, a cheerless future, and but spare means for extricating her from the coming storm.

The first thing was to see her. That his friends had counselled it he was glad. It is impossible to say that he would not have done

so himself without their advice; but he was certainly drifting the other way when his friend Thorncliffe came to see him. And he was backed by the lawyer: a fortuitous atom, drifting about in Piccadilly, but adding to the sum of the forces which urged him to do as he liked best. Surely it was his fate, and the suggestion, if of the devil, who sometimes assumes the shape of the law, irresistible.

Now the question was, what should he find her like, and what he should say to her? She would be upset by seeing him. That was certain. Not low and calm, as that plausible old sinner had told him: a good charitable man, that social Dick Turpin or Claude Duval, who gave away to the poor what he took from the rich, with his starched respectability and professional honesty. Not low and calm, but running to meet him, with the tears trickling down her cheeks, and hardly suppressed sobs at a sense of her coming misery. And he would have the pleasure of making her sit down, of taking her hand, and of drying her tears, of showing her that her loss was her gain, of arranging her matters of business, of

giving her an arm to lean upon, and of promising her a friendship for life, because she could accept nothing more. He would devote himself to her service, for he should never marry now.

Now nothing ever does turn out as we have previously arranged. We make a fine speech in Piccadilly to ourselves, and what a miserably cut-and-dried affair it turns out to be in Chester Street. The woman we want to console is not to be consoled; and the tender little drama is never played out. Who ever did find his picture realised, or conducted matters as they should have been conducted? Nobody, forsooth! and Deloraine was no exception to the rule.

Having arrived at some such point as this in his meditations, he turned into Chester Street, and, with a natural indecision, walked a little way down and crossed, with the intention of inspecting the house from the exterior. One does so with a letter not unfrequently, encouraging doubts and suspicions by looking at the seal instead of breaking it. His inspection was not satisfactory; but, as there was little to be guessed of the interior by the window cur-

tains and blinds, which were somewhat more closely drawn than usual, he at length knocked at the door.

Deloraine was left to his conjectures somewhat longer than is customary at a well-ordered house. The hall-porter was engaged with the last murder, and the footman was possibly putting on his coat, for either of which contingencies having left a sufficiently wide margin, Deloraine repeated his summons.

A few seconds later, and the door was opened.

In the place of the well-dressed footman, who might have been expected, there appeared a dingy and dilapidated old woman, dishevelled as to her hair, bonnet, bombazine, and boots, and palpably belonging to the class which is called "charing." The hall, too, had a dirty untidy look, which fitted precisely the presumed contradictory of the business of the janitress. Cleaning anything was entirely out of her power, though that was her avowed business; and certainly she had not begun at the hall. It showed unmistakeable symptoms of neglect; the stair-carpet was up, and lumped together,

with its brass rods, at the bottom of the stairs. No hats, coats, or umbrellas gave signs of habitation or of life; and the parlour door emitted a smell of dust and empty grates, very different from its appearance on Deloraine's last visit. It was, therefore, with considerable surprise and some hesitation that he asked for "Mrs. Ferrers."

"Lor' bless yer," said the old woman, removing her spectacles, through which she had been contemplating the inappropriate neatness of Deloraine, "she's been gone away these two days."

"And where is she gone to?"

The old woman looked at him with a cunning leer, and replied—

"There's more as 'ud like to know that, I suppose."

"What do you mean? Can't you tell me where I am likely to hear of Mrs. Ferrers?"

"Noa; I know nothin' about the missus. I'm only doing a bit o' cleanin' and packing. They're comin' for the pictures this arternoon, and Sellers (it's them as puts me in)—Sellers says, as the light furnitur' can be took away the

day arter. There's bin a mort o' people all yesterday askin' for Muster Ferrers, and the missus; lor' how they did go on; but," and here she rubbed her eyes with the corner of her apron, and a gleam of conscious light appeared to enter, "mayhap you're no ways one o' them. They don't owe you nothin'."

"Nothing at all," said Deloraine. "I'm a friend of Mrs. Ferrers, and came to see her on business. As it's of importance, if you know anything of her, tell me."

"I only know she's gone right away into the country; and," here she winked intelligibly, as she thought, "a very good move too. Oh! I bin in trouble myself, leastways my husband has, and it saves a deal o' bother to give 'em the slip at once. But, lor' bless me, you're the gentleman as there's a letter for, perhaps." With which words she left Deloraine in the hall while she dived into the now deserted kitchen.

He had a few minutes to congratulate himself on this piece of good fortune. "So she did think of me at the last, and I shall have the satisfaction of——"

At which crisis the old woman reappeared, bringing with her the letter, in the well-known hand—

"There, sir, I s'pose you're Mr. Weyland. It ought to ha' been posted the day before yesterday; but I forgot it. It can't be o' much consequence."

Deloraine took the letter; and his only satisfaction was that of being Mrs. Ferrers' footman as far as the nearest letter-box.

END OF VOL. II.

PRINTED BY VIRTUE AND CO., CITY ROAD, LONDON.

This book should be returned to the Library on or before the last date stamped below.

A fine is incurred by retaining it beyond the specified time.

Please return promptly.